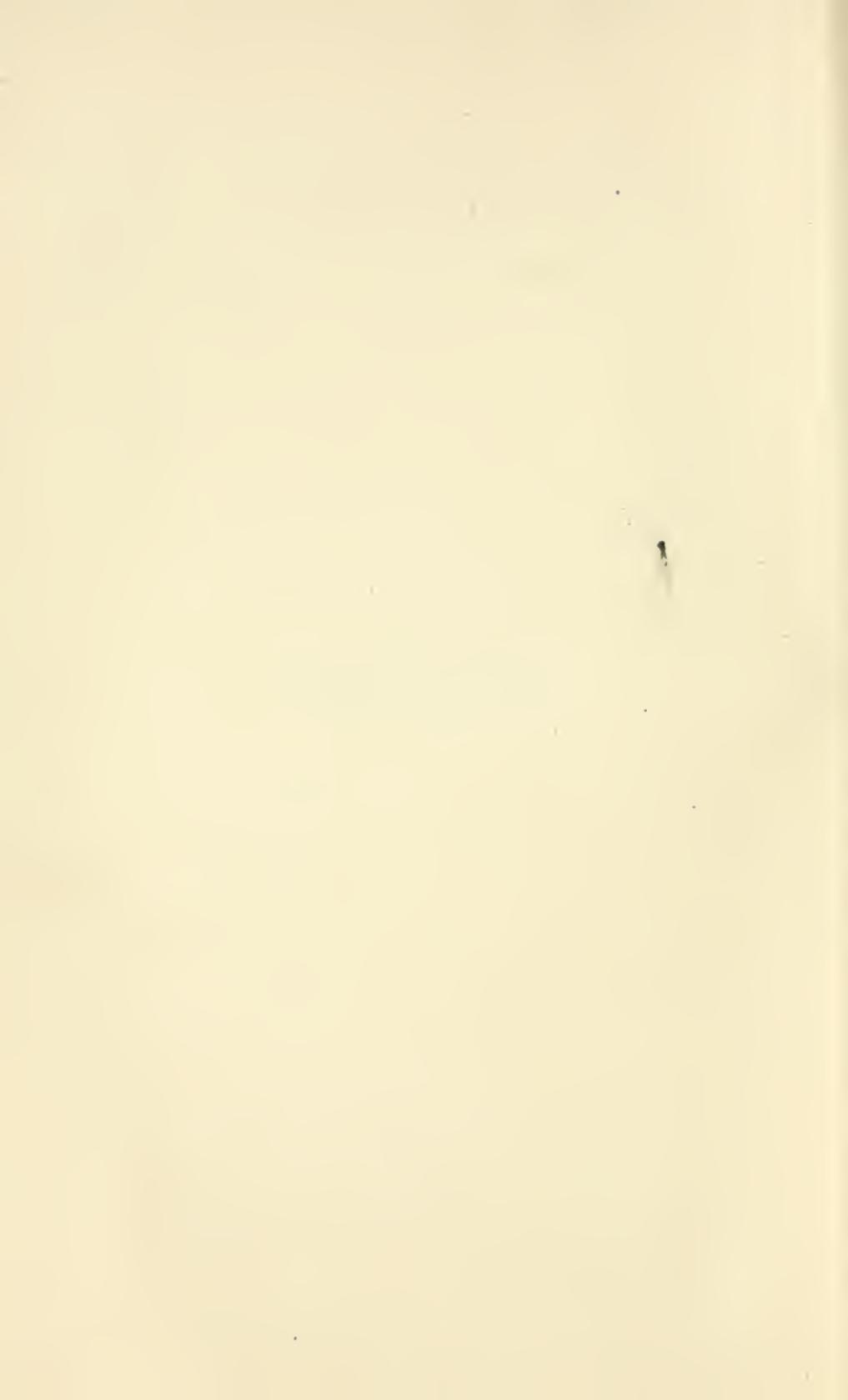




THE HAMMER







The Cave among the Mountains.

THE HAMMER

A STORY OF THE MACCABEAN TIMES

BY

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AND

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PREFACE

IT is not so very long since the Apocrypha was found in almost every copy of the English Bible, but in the present day it is seldom printed with it, and very seldom indeed read. One or two of the writings included under this name are trivial and even absurd; but, on the whole, the Apocryphal books deserve far more attention than they receive. Among the foremost, in point of interest and value, must be placed the First Book of Maccabees. Written within fifty years of the events which it records, at a time, it must be remembered, that was singularly barren of historical literature, it is a careful, sober, and consistent narrative. It is our principal, not unfrequently our sole, authority for the incidents of a very important period, a period that was in the highest degree critical in the history of the Jewish nation and of the world which that nation has so largely influenced. It is commonly said that the great visitation of the Captivity finally destroyed in the Hebrew mind the tendency to

idolatry. But the denunciations of Ezekiel prove to us that the exiles carried into the land of their captivity the evil which they had cherished in the land of their birth, and it is no less certain that they brought it back with them on their return. It grew to its height in the early part of the Second Century B.C., along with the increasing influence of Greek civilization in Western Asia. The feeble Jewish Commonwealth was more and more dominated by the powerful kingdoms which had been established on the ruins of the empire of Alexander, and the national religion was attacked by an enemy at least as dangerous as the Phœnician Baal-worship had been in earlier days, an enemy which may be briefly described by the word Hellenism. The story of how Judas and his brothers led the movement which rescued the Jewish faith from this peril is the story which we have endeavoured to tell in this volume. Our plan has been to follow strictly the lines of the First Book of Maccabees, going to the Second, a far less trustworthy document, only for some picturesque incidents. The subsidiary characters are fictitious, but the narrative is, we believe, apart from casual errors, historically correct.

We have to acknowledge special obligations to Captain Conder's "Judas Maccabæus," a volume of the series entitled "The New Plutarch." We also owe much to Canon Rawlinson's notes in the "Speaker's Commentary on the Bible," to Canon

Westcott's articles in the "Dictionary of the Bible," and to Dean Stanley's "Lectures on the Jewish Church."

If any reader should be curious as to the literary partnership announced on the title-page—a partnership that has grown, so to speak, out of another of many years' standing, shared by the writers as author and publisher—he may be informed that the plan of the story and a detailed outline of it have been contributed by Richmond Seeley, and the story itself written for the most part by Alfred Church.

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THE HAMMER

CHAPTER I.

A NEW ORDER OF THINGS.

THE time is the evening of a day in the early autumn of the year 174 B.C. There has been a great festival in Jerusalem. But it has been curiously unlike any festival that one would have expected to be held in that famous city. The people have not been crowding in from the country, and journeying from their far-off places of sojourn among the heathen, to keep one of the great feasts of the Law. Nothing could be further from the thoughts of the crowd that is streaming out of this new building which stands close under the walls of the Temple. What would they who built the Temple some two and a half centuries before have thought of this strange intruder on the sacred precincts? It is not difficult to imagine, for the new erection is nothing more or less than a Circus,

built and furnished in the latest Greek fashion, and the spectacle which the crowd has been enjoying, or pretending to enjoy—for it is strange to all, and distasteful to some—is an imitation of the Olympian games. Things then, we see, have been curiously changed. Even the city has almost lost its identity. It is no longer the capital of the Jewish nation, but the chief town of an insignificant province in the Greek kingdom of Syria, one of the fragments into which the great dominion of Alexander had split some hundred and fifty years before. We shall understand something more about this marvellous change if we listen to a conversation that is going on in one of the houses that adjoin the Temple.

“ Well, Cleon, you will allow that our little show to-day has been fairly successful. We are but novices, you know; barbarians, I am afraid you will call us. But we hope to improve. You Greeks are wonderful teachers. You can give in a very short time a quite marvellous appearance of refinement to the merest savages. And we are not that; you would not call us savages, my dear friend.”

“ Savages! The gods forbid that such insolent folly should ever come from my tongue! You have a most elegant taste in art, my dear Jason. Our own Callias—he is our first *connoisseur* at Athens; you must have heard me mention him—would not disdain to have some of the little things which you have about you here in his own apartment.”

And, as he spoke, Cleon looked round the room, which, indeed, was very handsomely furnished in the latest Greek taste. The walls were covered with tapestry, showing on a purple ground a design, worked in silver and gold, which represented the triumphant return of the Wine-god from his Eastern campaigns. At one end of the room stood a sumptuously-carved bookcase, filled with volumes adorned by the most skilful binders of Alexandria. The bookcase was flanked on either side by a pedestal statue, one displaying the head of Hermes, the other the head of Athené. On a sideboard were ranged twelve silver goblets, on which had been worked in high relief the labours of Hercules. But probably the most precious object in the room—at least in its master's estimation—was a replica, about half the size of life, of the statue that we know as the “Dying Gladiator.” It was the work of a sculptor of Pergamum, a special favourite of the art-loving dynasty of the Attali. It had been purchased for the enormous sum of half a talent of gold;¹ and Jason had thought himself especially fortunate in being allowed to secure it on any terms. The Pergamene artist was bound, in consideration of the handsome payment which he received from his royal patron, not to execute commissions for strangers, and it was only as a special favour, and not till a heavy bribe had been

¹ Nearly £2,000.

paid to some influential personage in the court, that the rule had been relaxed in favour of Jason.

And who, it may be asked, was Jason ?

Jason was the Jewish high priest, the successor of Aaron, of Eleazar, of Jehoiada, of Hilkiah, and as unlike these worthies of the past in appearance, in speech, in ways of thinking, as it is possible to conceive. His costume, in the first place, was that of a Greek exquisite. He wore a purple tunic, showing at the neck a crimson under-shirt, and gathered up at the waist with a belt of the finest leather, clasped with a design in silver, which showed a dog laying hold of a fawn. His knees were bare, but the shins were covered with silk leggings of the same colour as the tunic, against which the gold fastenings of the sandals showed in gay relief. His hair was elaborately curled, and almost dripping with the richest of Syrian perfumes. The forefinger of the left hand showed the head of Zeus finely carved on an amethyst, that of the right was circled by a sapphire ring with the likeness of Apollo.

His speech was Greek. Hebrew of course he knew, both in its classical and its conversational forms; but he was as careful to conceal his knowledge as an old-fashioned Roman of his time would have been careful to hide the fact, if he had happened to know any language besides his own. His very name, it will have been observed, had been changed to suit the new fashion which he was endeavouring

to set to his countrymen. Really it was Joshua—no dishonourable appellation, one would think, seeing that it had been borne by the conqueror of Canaan, and by the most distinguished of the later high priests. But it did not please him, and he had changed it to Jason.

As for his ways of thinking, these will become evident enough if we listen to a little more of his conversation.

“And you think, Cleon,” he went on—Cleon was a Greek adventurer who gave himself out as an Athenian, but who was shrewdly suspected of coming from one of the smaller islands of the *Ægean*—“you think that our games went pretty well?”

“Admirably, my dear Jason,” answered the Greek, who really had thought them a deplorable failure, but who valued too much his free quarters in the high priest’s sumptuous palace to give a candid expression of his opinion.

“You see we had great difficulties to contend with. You can hardly imagine, for instance, how hard I found it to persuade our young men to run and wrestle naked. They quoted some ridiculous nonsense from the Law, as if we could be bound nowadays by some obsolete old rules that no sensible person would think for a moment of observing.¹ You saw, I dare say, to-day that I was

¹ “The exceeding profaneness of Jason, that ungodly wretch, and no high priest” (2 Macc. iv. 13).

obliged to allow some of them to wear a loin-cloth. They positively refused to come into the arena without it. Well, we shall educate them in time. They *must* learn to admire the beauty of the human form, unspoilt by any of the trappings with which, for convenience sake, we are accustomed to conceal it. I don't despair of our having a school of art here some day—not rivals, my dear Lysias, of your glorious Phidias and Praxiteles, but imitators, humble imitators, whom yet you won't disdain to acknowledge."

"But, my dear sir, you forget the Commandment, 'Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image.'"

The speaker was a young man who had hitherto taken no part in the conversation. He also had a Hebrew name and a Greek. His father, a rich priest who claimed descent from no less a person than the prophet Ezekiel, had called him Micah; but he had followed the fashion, and dubbed himself Menander. Still, Greek ways and habits did not sit over-easily upon him. Fashion has often a singular power over the young; but it could not quite drive out the obstinate patriotism of the Jew. He could still sometimes be scandalized at the thorough-going Hellenism of the high priest; and he was so scandalized now. The Commandment was one of the things which he had learnt at his mother's knee, and which he had solemnly repeated

when, at the age of twelve, he had been regularly admitted to the privileges of a “son of the Law.”

“ My dear Menander,” broke in the high priest, “ what can you be thinking about? I had hoped better things of you. You do discourage me most terribly. ‘ No graven image or likeness of anything that is in heaven or earth! ’ Was there ever anything so hopelessly tasteless? Why, this is the one thing that has checked all growth of art among us? And without art where is the beauty of life? Now tell me, Menander, did you ever see anything so hideous as the Temple? There is a certain splendour about it—or was, till I had to strip off most of the gold for purposes of state—but of beauty or taste not a scrap. You, Cleon, have never seen the inside of it. Well, you have lost nothing. It would simply shock you after your lovely Parthenon. Bells and pomegranates—things that any moulder could make—and sham columns, and everything as bad as it can be. And then the dresses! You should see—though I should really be ashamed if you did see it—the absurd costume that some of them would make me wear as high priest. Anything more cumbrous and clumsy could not be. A man can hardly move in it; and as for showing any of the proportions of the figure—and I take it that dress is meant to reveal while it seems to hide them—one might as well be wrapped up in swaddling clothes.”

“ Did you ever wear it ? ” asked Cleon.

“ Once, and once only,” answered Jason. “ That was on the day when I was admitted to the office. You see it had to be done. Some of my enemies—and I am afraid that I have enemies after all that I have done for this ungrateful people—might have said that things were not regular without it, and when one has paid twenty talents of gold for the office, it would be rank folly to risk it for a trifle. But I have never worn it since, and never mean to again. I did design something much lighter and neater, worthy the Greek fashion, but with just a tinge—it would be well to have a tinge—of our own in it ; but it did not please the elders when I showed it to them, a bigoted set of fools ! ”

“ But your worship is very fine, I am told,” said the Greek.

“ Very tasteless, very tasteless,” answered the high-priest, “ the singing and music as rude as possible. I tried to improve them when I first came into office. When I was at Antioch I saw some very pretty performances in the groves of Daphne, and I wanted to remodel our ceremonies on something of the same lines. Of course I could not transplant them just as they were : you will guess that there were one or two things that would hardly do here. I am not strait-laced, as you know, but there are limits. However, it all came to nothing. Our people are so clumsy and obstinate. So the

only thing will be to let these antiquated ceremonies die out by degrees."

Micah broke in at this point. Disposed as he was to follow Jason's lead, this was going too far. "Surely, my dear sir, if you take away from us all that is distinctive, where will be our reason for existence? After all is said, we are not Greeks and never can be Greeks; and if we cease to be Jews, what are we?"

"*Jews!* my dear fellow," cried the high-priest, "why do you use the odious word? We are not Jews, we are Antiochenes. Do you know that I paid five talents to the treasurer of Antiochus for license to use the name? For Heaven's sake, let us have our money's worth. By the way," he went on, turning to Cleon, "when does your Olympian festival next take place?"

"In two years' time," said the Greek.

"I propose to send an embassy with a handsome present for your great temple. I should like to establish friendly relations with your people at the head-quarters of your race. Do you think it is possible that our Menon—you saw him in the stadium just now—might be allowed to run? It would take all that your athletes know to beat him."

"Quite impossible. He could hardly make out a Greek pedigree, I suppose?"

"No; he could not do that. But would not money smooth the way?"

“It could not be. Money will do most things with us, as it will elsewhere, but not that. A man must show a pure Greek descent.”

“But the embassy can go?”

“Certainly,” replied the Greek, with a smile; “we are ready to take gifts from any one. But—excuse my obtruding the suggestion—is it quite wise to run counter to your people’s prejudices in this way? Couldn’t they get up an agitation against you?”

“My dear Cleon, I feel quite easy on that score. I made the highest bid for the place, and it is mine, just as much as this ring is mine.”

“But might not some one outbid you? I have heard of such things being done.”

“Outbid me? Hardly. I have squeezed the uttermost farthing out of the people to pay the purchase-money and the tribute, and I defy my rivals, with all the best will in the world, to beat me. Why, my fellows, the tax-gatherers, are the most ingenious rascals in the world for putting on the screw. I make them bid against each other when I put the taxes up to auction, and they really go to figures that I should not have thought possible. And then, after all, they manage somehow or other to get a handsome margin of profit for themselves. I know the scoundrels always seem to have a great deal more money than I have.”

Menander, somewhat revolted at his friend’s levity, rose to take leave. “Stop a moment,” said Jason,

“I have a little commission for you, which will give you a pleasant outing and a score or two of shekels to put in your pocket.”

“Well, the shekels will be welcome. Those are very charming fellows, those Greek friends of yours,” he went on, addressing Cleon, “but they have the most confounded luck with the dice that I ever knew. But what is it, sir, that you want me to do?”

“I want to do a civil thing to our friends at Tyre. You know that we do a very brisk trade with them, and a little bit of politeness is never thrown away. Well, next month they have the great games of Hercules, and I want you to take a present to the Governor, and, as you will be there, just a trifle—a silver tripod, or something of the kind—for Hercules himself. The Tyrian people would take it amiss, I fancy, if you went quite empty-handed.”

Micah—for at the moment he felt much more like a Micah than a Menander—flushed all over. “I take a present to the idol at Tyre! You must be joking; but, with all respect, sir, it is a joke which I do not appreciate.”

“Come, my dear Menander,” said the high priest, with a laugh, “why all this fuss? You must excuse me for saying so, but you are really a little stupid this morning. What nonsense to talk about idols! The Greek heroes are really the same as our own. Hercules is nothing more or less than Samson

under another name. You will find in every country the legend of some strong man who goes about killing wild beasts and slaying his enemies, and doing all kinds of wonders; and it does not become an enlightened man like yourself to fancy that our hero is anything better than another nation's hero. However, think the matter over. If you don't choose to go there are plenty who will, and Tyre, I am told, is still worth seeing, though, of course, it is nothing like what it was."

At this moment a servant burst somewhat unceremoniously into the room.

"How now, fellow?" cried the high priest, "Where are your manners? Don't you know that I have company and am not to be interrupted?"

"Pardon, my lord," said the man, in a breathless, agitated voice, "but the matter is urgent. Your nephew Asaph is dying, and has sent begging you to come to him."

"Asaph dying!" cried the high priest, turning pale. "How is that?"

Asaph had been one of the performers in the exhibition of the day. A light weight, but an exceedingly active and skilful wrestler, he had entered the lists with a competitor much stronger and heavier than himself. The struggle between the two athletes had been protracted and fierce and had ended in a draw. There had been two bouts, but in neither had this or that antagonist been able

to claim a decided success. In each, both wrestlers had fallen, Asaph being uppermost in the first, but underneath in the second. On rising from the ground he had complained of severe internal pains ; but these had seemed to pass away, and he had been conveyed in a litter to his mother's house. After a brief interval the pains had returned with increased severity ; vomiting of blood had followed, and the physician had declared that the resources of his art were useless. The poor lad—he was but a few months over twenty—sent, in his agony, for his uncle the high priest. It was a forlorn hope—for how could such a man give comfort ?—but it was the only one that occurred to him.

No one was more conscious of the incongruity of the task thus imposed upon him, the task of administering consolation and comfort to the dying, than Jason himself. His first impulse was to refuse to go. But to do so would not only cause a scandal, but would also be the beginning of a family feud. And Jason, though selfish and hardened by base ambitions, was not wholly without a heart. He had some affection for his sister, a widow of large means, whose purse was always open to him when he wanted help, and Asaph—or Asius, as he preferred to call him—was his favourite nephew, possibly his successor in his office. He felt that he must go, but it was with a miserable sinking of heart that he felt it.

"Lead on," he said to the slave, "I will follow. You, my friends, must excuse me."

The worldly priest might well have dreaded to enter the house of woe to which he had been called.

The unhappy mother met him at the door. "Oh, Joshua!" she cried, the foolish affectation of the Greek name being forgotten in the hour of trouble. "Can you help us? My dear Asaph is dying, and he is terribly distressed about his sins. You are high-priest. Have you not some power to do him good?"

"Take me to him," said Jason, "I will do all that I can for him."

The unhappy lad was lying on a couch, the deathly pallor of his face showing with a terrible contrast against the rich purple of the coverlet. His eyes were wide open, and there was a terror-stricken look in them that was inexpressibly painful to witness. As soon as he saw his uncle, he burst forth in tones of agonized entreaty. "I have sinned; I have sinned; I have followed in the ways of the heathen, and, see, my God hath called me into judgment. Help me! help me! Save me from the fire of Gehenna!"

The high priest strove to say something; but his faltering lips seemed to refuse to do their office.

"Speak! speak!" cried the young man. "It was you who told me to go into the arena. You

said there was no harm in it ; you encouraged me, and now you desert me. O help me ! ” and his voice, which had been raised to a loud, angry cry, sank again to low tones of entreaty. “ You are high priest ; you surely can do something with the Lord. Pray for me to Him. Quick ! quick ! the evil ones are clutching at me ! ” and, as he spoke, he turned his eyes with a fearful glance as if he saw some terrible presence which was invisible to the rest.

His uncle, more unhappy than he had ever been before in his life, stood in dumb despair. It seemed impossible to mock this wretched creature with words in which he did not himself believe. And, indeed, the words themselves seemed to have fled altogether from his memory. At last, with a tremendous effort, he summoned up some of the words, once familiar to his lips, but which had not issued from them for years. It was what we know as the fifty-first Psalm in our psalter that he began—“ *Have mercy upon me, O God, after Thy great goodness, according to the multitude of Thy mercies do away mine offences.* ” He began with a faltering and uncertain voice, which gathered strength as he went on. The dying man listened with an eagerly-strained attention, and the words seemed to have some soothing effect upon him. When the speaker came to the words, “ Cast me not away from Thy presence,” he clasped his hands together. At the very moment of the act a strong

convulsion shook his frame: a stream of blood gushed from his mouth; in another moment Asaph was dead.

His unhappy mother had been carried fainting to her apartments, where her maids were endeavouring to restore her to consciousness. The high priest was almost glad that she was in such a state that there could be no question of attempting to administer to her any consolation. No one, indeed, could have felt less like a comforter than he did at that moment. As he walked slowly back to his palace he felt less satisfied with the Greek fashions, for which he had sacrificed the faith of his fathers, than he had done for many years.

The news that he found awaiting him at home changed the current of his thoughts. A letter, carried, in Eastern fashion, by a succession of runners, had arrived from Joppa. It was as follows:—

“Josedech, Chief of the Council of Joppa, to Joshua, Governor of Jerusalem.

“Know that a swift pinnace has arrived, bringing news that the fleet of Antiochus the King is on its way hither. It will arrive, unless it be hindered by weather or any other unforeseen cause, on the second day. Let us know so soon as shall be possible how the heathen should be received, whether we shall admit him into the city, and to whom we shall assign the task of entertaining him. Farewell.”

Jason's face flushed as he read this curt and not very courteous epistle. “Governor of Jerusalem, indeed!” he muttered to himself. “So the old bigot

won't acknowledge me to be high priest. I shall have to give him a lesson, and teach him who he is and who I am. 'How the heathen is to be received.' What is the fool thinking of? As if he could be shut out of the city if he chooses to come in! Well, I see plainly enough that there will be mischief here, if I don't take care. It won't be enough to write. I must send some of my own people to receive the king."

He pressed a hand-bell that stood on the table. "Send the letter-carrier here," he said to the servant who answered the summons. In a few minutes the man appeared.

"When can you start back with my answer?" asked the high priest.

"This instant, my lord, if it should so please you."

"And the other posts are ready?"

"Each at his place, my lord."

"And when will the letter be delivered in Joppa?"

"Let me think," said the messenger. "The distance should be about two hundred and eighty furlongs, and the way descends. 'Tis now scarcely the first hour of the night. I should say that the letter should be there an hour before midnight."

Jason at once sat down and wrote his answer:—

"*Jason, the High Priest, to Josedech, Chief of the Council of Joppa,*
greeting.

"I charge you that you do all honour to the most mighty and

glorious lord Antiochus. Let him have of the best, both in lodging and entertainment, that your city affords. I doubt not your zeal and goodwill, but that you may not fail for want of knowledge, I will send certain of my own people, who will welcome the most august King in such manner as shall be worthy both of his majesty and of our dignity. Farewell."

The messenger, who had been standing by while this letter was being written, received the document with a salute, and placed it in his girdle. A few minutes afterwards he was on his way.

"And now for the deputation to meet his Highness," said Jason to himself. "I cannot expect them to get off quite so quickly as this good fellow. But they must not start later than noon to-morrow. And now, whom am I to send? Cleon, of course, and Menander——"

He stopped short and reflected. "It's really very hard to find a respectable person who is quite free from bigotry—if, indeed, it is bigotry." For some minutes he seemed lost in thought. "Send the secretary to me," he said, when the servant came. This official soon made his appearance, and we will leave him and his master to settle the details of the deputation.

CHAPTER II.

ANTIOCHUS.

THE greater part of the population of Joppa, which, like most seaside towns, was somewhat cosmopolitan in its habits and ways of thinking, had hurried down to the shore to watch the arrival of the great Syrian King. And, indeed, his fleet was a sight worth seeing. Thirty ships, all of them with three banks of oars, were formed in a semicircle, the arc of which was parallel with the line of the shore. They were war-vessels, the finest and swiftest that the Syrian fleet possessed, manned with picked crews, and now gay with all the sumptuous adornments that befitted a peaceful errand. The day was perfectly windless, and the sea as calm as a lake. This circumstance made it possible for the squadron to preserve the order of its advance with an exactitude which would not have been possible had it been moving under sail. On the prow of each vessel stood a flute-player, and the rowers dipped their

oars in time to his music. Each player had his eyes fixed on a conductor who was posted on the royal vessel, a five-banked ship, which occupied a position slightly in advance of the semicircle. Time was thus kept throughout the squadron—a result, however, not obtained, as may easily be imagined, without a vast amount of practice. The sight of the thousands of oars, as they were dipped and lifted again in rhythmical regularity, with the sunshine flashing upon them, was beautiful in the extreme. As for the ship that carried King Antiochus, it was a gorgeous spectacle. The ropes were of gaily-coloured silk; the hull was brilliant with gold. The figure-head was the head and bust of a sea-nymph, exquisitely wrought in silver. The poop was covered with a crimson awning.

As the squadron approached the harbour, a convenience which the Joppa of to-day no longer possesses, the royal ship fell back, allowing the leading vessels on either side of the semicircle to precede it to the pier. From these a company of troops, splendidly arrayed in gilded armour, disembarked, and formed two lines, between which the King was to walk.

The Syrian King was a young man of about two-and-twenty years, tall, and well made, and not without a certain dignity of presence. His face, too, at first sight would have been pronounced handsome. It was of the true Greek type: the forehead and

nose forming an almost uninterrupted straight line. This line, however, receded too much, giving something of an expression of weakness. But for this the features of the young Syrian king might have been described as bearing a singular resemblance to those of the great Alexander. Youthful as he was, his complexion, naturally of a beautiful delicacy, was already flushed with excess. But the most sinister characteristic of his face was to be found in the restless look of his prominent eyes. The descendants of the brilliant soldier, the ablest and most upright of the generals of Alexander, who had founded the Syrian kingdom, had sadly degenerated under the corrupting influences of power. The hideous example of lust and cruelty had been set and improved upon by generation after generation, till the fatal taint of madness, always the avenger of such wickedness, had been developed in the race.¹

The Council of Joppa had sent a deputation of their body, headed by their president, Josedech, to receive the visitor with such respect as might lawfully be shown to a heathen. Greeting and compliments could be exchanged without any loss of ceremonial purity. Nor would there be any harm in presenting a gift. To sit down to meat with an

¹ Antiochus's surname, self-assumed or given by the flattery of his courtiers, of "Epiphanes" (the Illustrious), was jestingly changed by his subjects through the alteration of a single letter into "Epimanes" (Madman).

unbeliever, was, of course, out of the question ; but this difficulty had been overcome by the complaisance of a wealthy Greek merchant, who, for sufficient reasons of his own, had offered to entertain the visitor.

The councillors saluted the King, not with the extravagant form of “Live for ever !” but with the more moderate form of “Peace be with you.” Antiochus answered with a careless greeting. At the same time he turned to one of his courtiers, and said in a whisper which was heard, as it was meant to be heard, by others besides the persons addressed, “Look ! what a set of he-goats. And faugh ! how they smell !” The young King, who was exceedingly vain of his good looks, had the fancy of making himself up as the beardless Apollo, and, of course, the court followed the fashion that he set. The insulting words did not fail to reach the ears of the elders, but they affected not to have heard them. The president then proceeded to deliver his address of welcome. It was sufficiently civil, but, as may be supposed, not enthusiastic. The speaker hoped that friendly relations might continue to exist between the Jewish people and the kingdom of Syria. He was glad to receive on Jewish soil a powerful monarch who, he trusted, would be favourably impressed with what he should see and hear. If his subjects had any grievances they would find

prompt redress; the King would doubtless do the same for Jewish merchants who considered themselves aggrieved.

To this address, which, after the manner of such documents, was somewhat verbose and lengthy, Antiochus listened with ill-concealed impatience; perhaps it would be more correct to say, with impatience that was not concealed at all. He fidgeted about; he interjected disparaging remarks that must have been distinctly heard a long way off. He even corrected the speaker when he made a slip in Greek idiom. Still the elders preserved an imper-
turbable calm, though a keen observer might have seen the flush rising upon their faces.

The address of welcome ended, it only remained to offer the customary present. An attendant stepped forward carrying a robe of honour, a piece of native manufacture, which, without being particularly splendid, was sufficiently handsome and valuable to be adequate to the occasion. But it did not please the young King, who, indeed, was scarcely in the humour to be pleased with anything. One of his followers received it from the hands of the attendant, and Antiochus, according to the usual etiquette, should have touched it, saying at the same time a few words of politeness. What he did was to take it from the hands of the courtier who had received it, shake it out, and hold it from him at arm's length, eyeing it, at

the same time, with an expression of undisguised contempt. Even this was not all. Turning his back upon the elders he dropped the robe on the head of one of his attendants, and, by a sudden movement, twisted it round his neck, bursting out at the same time into a loud horse-laugh. The laugh was, of course, dutifully echoed by his courtiers; but to the Joppa crowd it seemed no laughing matter. An angry murmur ran through it. The front ranks made a menacing movement forwards, while stones began to fly from behind. On the other hand, the soldiers of the King's body-guard drew their swords, and began to form up behind him. They were not properly prepared, however, for a conflict; for, as they had come only on a service of ceremony, they had nothing with them but their swords and light ornamental breastplates.

Everything wore a most threatening look, when there occurred an interruption that was probably welcome to every one, except, it may be, the hot-headed and reckless young sovereign himself. The deputation from Jerusalem had arrived. The high priest, anticipating, as we have seen, some trouble, had despatched them at the very earliest opportunity, and had urged them to make the best of their way to their destination. At the same time, that their presence might have something more than moral weight, he had sent a squadron of cavalry.

The deputation, with their escort following close behind, now made their way through the crowd.

The high priest was represented by his kinsman Phinehas—who had found a substitute for his unfashionable name in Phineus—by Menander, who has been already mentioned, and by two Greeks, of whom our acquaintance Cleon was one. Josedech and his companions willingly left the management of affairs in the hands of the new arrivals, and retired from the scene. Leaping from his horse, Phinehas, or Phineus, prostrated himself in Eastern fashion at the feet of Antiochus, and his companions followed his example, while the escort of cavalry saluted. “Rise,” said Antiochus, whose good humour began to return when he found himself treated with what he conceived to be proper respect. He even condescended to reach out his royal hand, and assist the envoy to recover his feet. Phineus proceeded to deliver an address of welcome which was certainly not wanting in florid compliment. It might even have been called profane, for Antiochus was described not only as magnificent, illustrious, victorious (to mention a few only of the speaker’s exuberant supply of epithets), but even as divine. The speech ended, an attendant presented a richly-chased casket of gold, filled with coins, fresh from the Syrian mint, and bearing the features and superscription of Antiochus himself. The King received it with

something like *empressoement*, and after speaking a few words of thanks, passed it to his treasurer. At the same time he took a bag of silver from one of his attendants, and condescended to scatter some of the pieces among the crowd that lined the quays, with his royal hands. As may be supposed, a vigorous scramble ensued, and not a few of the spectators were tumbled over the edge into the shallow water below. Others jumped in of their own accord after some of the pieces which had fallen short. A general burst of laughter was the result, and the situation lost the gravity which had been so alarming a few minutes before.

The King now recognized an old acquaintance in Cleon. Antiochus, handed over in his childhood as a hostage by his father, had spent his boyhood and youth in Rome. The somewhat austere manners of that city had not pleased him, and he was glad to find in the young Greek an acquaintance more congenial than the young Marcelli, sons of the priest of that name, under whose charge he had been put. Cleon had come to Rome to seek his fortune, and had found employment in assisting the comic poet Cæcilius in making his translations from the Greek. Poets, however, were not so well paid as to be able to spare much for their assistants, and Cleon had been very glad to act as the young prince's teacher, a post which his guardian the priest had

found it very difficult to fill. Tutor and pupil had been on the most friendly terms. The elder man was indulgent, exacted no more than the youth was willing to learn, and, possibly thinking that all the necessary austerity was supplied by the Roman guardian, winked at various indulgences which would not have approved themselves to his employer. Antiochus retained a grateful recollection of the complaisant youth who had made things so agreeable for him in the days of his captivity.

“Hail, Cleon, most delightful of teachers, behold the most thankful of pupils!”

And he embraced the Greek, kissing him on both cheeks.

“So you, too,” he went on, “have escaped from that dismal prison-house across the sea! Was there ever a place, think you, more unfit for a gentleman to live in? And how have you fared since I saw you? I hope that Fortune has had something pleasant in store for you.”

“She could have done nothing better, Sire, than to thus give me the pleasure of seeing you.”

“Oh, what a compliment! I see that your tongue has not lost its dexterous twist. But I suppose I must attend to this stupid business here. Why can’t they let one come quietly, and see what people really are. I dare say there are some good fellows here as elsewhere; but all these ceremonies and speech-making and fine clothes tire me to death.

Well, we shall find a chance of having some talk together before long. Anyhow, you will come and see me at Antioch. I will make you court-poet, or general-in-chief, or high priest of Aphrodite! I know that you can do anything that you choose to turn your hand to."

While this conversation was going on the Greek merchant who had volunteered to entertain the royal visitor was waiting to be introduced. This ceremony performed by Phineus, he proceeded to give his invitation.

"Will your Highness be pleased to accept such humble hospitality as I can offer? My house and all that is within it are at your service."

"Pleased! of course I shall be pleased," returned the King, in boisterous good humour. "I know what your 'humble hospitality' means. It is you merchants that can afford to do things handsomely. You make the money, and we can only spend it. What with armies and fleets and legions of servants, who eat us up like so many locusts, we never have a drachma that we can call our own. As for me, I am easily satisfied. Give me a mullet, a piece of roast kid, a flask of good wine, and a pretty girl to hand the cup, and I want no more. Lead on."

The procession moved on to the merchant's house. This reached, the King, who declared that he wanted his midday sleep, was at once shown to his apartments.

It was some six hours later when the banquet, for which the host had made magnificent preparations, was ready. The company was assembled, and was fairly numerous, though it did not contain the true *élite* of Joppa society. With one or two not very respectable exceptions, the representatives of the high-class Jewish families were absent. But there were plenty of strangers in the town, and the room was sufficiently full. The trading community was present in force: Greeks, Syrians, Egyptians, Carthaginians, and even a Greek-speaking Gaul from Marseilles, were present. Rome was represented by two Roman knights, who were doing a profitable business in money-lending, and who had the name of pretty nearly every noble in Syria on their books.

But the guest of the evening was absent. The company waited with the patience with which royal personages are waited for on such occasions. At last, when an hour had gone beyond the time fixed for the entertainment, the host ventured to send up to the King's apartment, with a humble reminder that the banquet was ready. But the apartment was empty!

“What can have become of him?” was the thought in every one's mind, not unaccompanied by a certain anxiety in the older courtiers, who had observed with dismay the reckless proceedings of their master.

At last a thought struck Cleon. He took the

chief of the King's attendants aside and communicated to him his suspicions. "I saw something of his Highness's ways at Rome," he said, "and I can guess what has happened. He always had a fancy for disguises, for dressing himself up as a sailor or an artizan, and going to some very curious places in the city. Often and often have I been with him—to keep him out of mischief, you know—and, by the gods! it was well I did. I remember his being very nearly stabbed one night in a low wine-shop in the Suburra.¹ And now I remember that this morning his Highness said something about wanting to see what the people really were, without all this ceremony. Let us question the porter whether he has seen any one go out."

The porter was questioned accordingly. At first he could give no information. At last he remembered observing two young men in sailor's dress passing the gate about three hours before. He had taken no heed of them. Sailors had been coming and going all day, with various articles which they were bringing up from the ship, and he had supposed that these were two of the number. Here the man's wife struck in with the information that she had noticed the two sailors, thinking that there was something odd about their appearance; their clothes were very shabby, but they had a superior

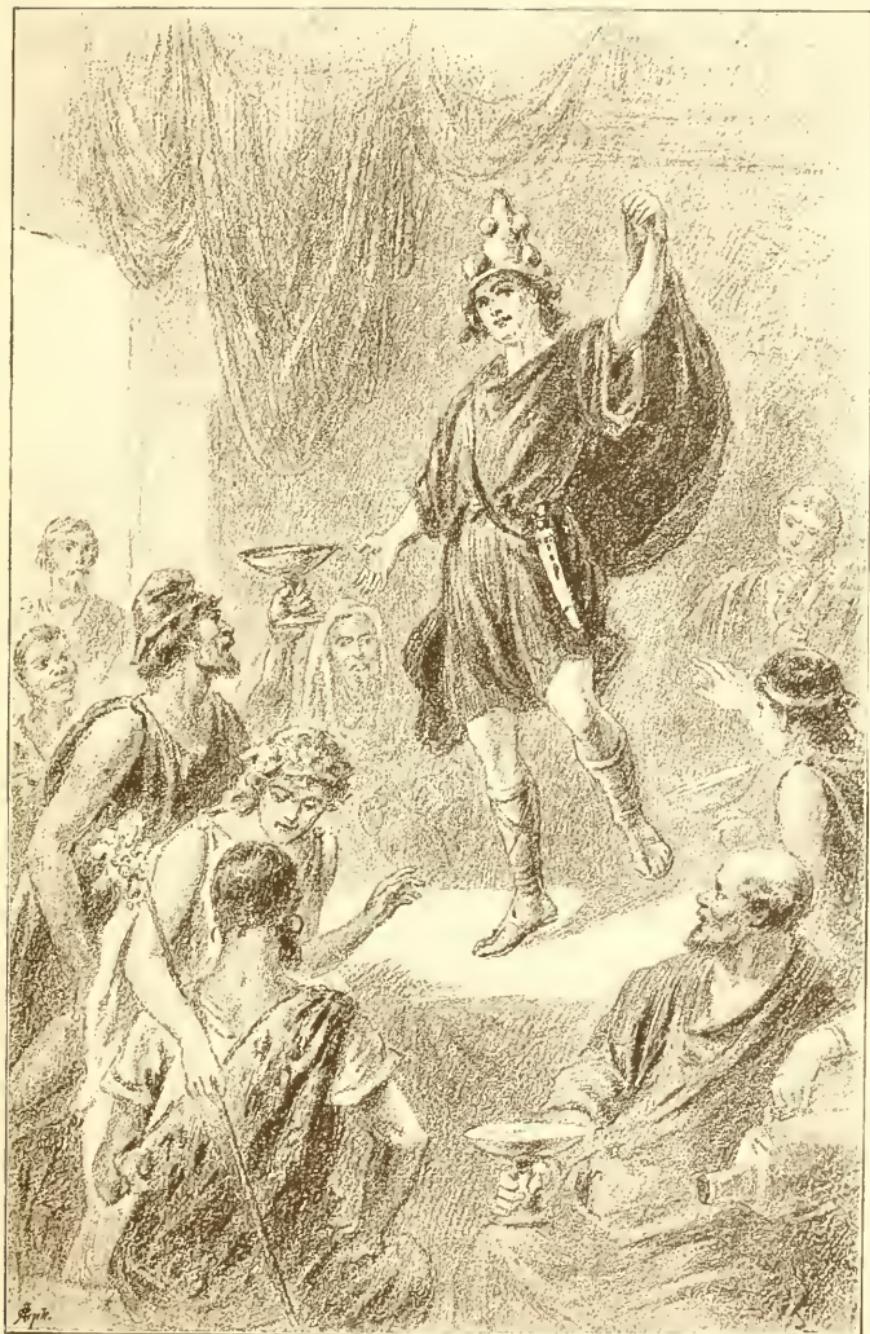
¹ The Suburra was one of the least reputable quarters in Rome.

air. Neither the man nor his wife knew anything more; but they thought that the two had turned in the direction of the harbour after leaving the house.

Under these circumstances search seemed hopeless, and might, indeed, do more harm than good. Perhaps the safest plan would be to let the young man find his way back for himself. After some discussion, however, it was resolved that Cleon, after first changing the dress which he had donned for the banquet for something less conspicuous, should look in at some of the wine-shops near the harbour, which were suggested as likely places for the search by the character of the King's disguise.

Cleon was successful beyond his expectation. His attention was attracted by the sound of boisterous laughter proceeding from a tavern whose windows fronted the place where the King had landed. The place was crowded to overflowing, and even the pavement before the house was thronged with idlers, who were content to hear what they could of the fun inside without having any score to pay. With no little difficulty Cleon edged his way into the principal room. It was a strange scene that met his eye. The room was crowded with Phœnician and Greek sailors, with here and there the swarthy face of a Moor among them. The guests sat on benches, closely packed together, and every one had a huge earthenware cup in his hand and a pitcher of wine at his feet. At the further end of the room

was a small platform reserved for the performers who were accustomed to entertain the audience. A couple of dancing-girls had just exhibited a dance of the boisterous kind which was specially favoured by the seafaring spectators; and now his Syrian Majesty was doing his best to entertain the company with the burlesque of a Roman electioneering oration. He spoke in Greek, or, rather, the mixture of tongues, the *Lingua Franca* of the time, which did duty for Greek in the seaport towns of the Eastern Mediterranean; and he used with considerable effect the broad Roman accent. His speech, could it be reproduced, would be dull or even unintelligible to us, but his audience found it highly entertaining. The Greeks, always quick-witted, caught the points with admirable readiness, and the others laughed, if not for any other reason, at least for sympathy. The most completely successful part was where the orator, who affected to be a candidate for the consulship, propounded a grand scheme, according to which the citizens of Rome were to live in idleness, supported by the contributions of the whole world. When the attention of the audience began to flag, the young Prince, with an audacious presence of mind that would have become a veteran performer, suddenly changed the entertainment. Sticking a tall cap on his head, he proceeded to give a ludicrous imitation of the solemn dance of the priests of Mars. Cleon had



Antiochus in the Tavern.

seen the original performance in Rome, and he could not but confess that the slow, awkward movement, and droning chant which the performer adapted to a popular song of a somewhat equivocal kind, was a very clever piece of work.

A few minutes afterwards Antiochus retired, breathless with his exertions, and Cleon made his way after him.

“So you are here,” burst out the King. “Good, was it not?”

“Excellent, my lord,” returned Cleon; “but you must excuse me if I ask you to come back. The banquet is ready, and the company are waiting for you.”

“Confound the company; there is much better company here. I will stop where I am.”

Cleon remonstrated and argued; at first, it seemed, with no effect. Finally, however, by a judicious mixture of flattery and promises, and specially, by enlarging on the opportunity that there would be of electrifying the *élite* of Joppa by a display of eloquence, he induced the King to come away. Antiochus was eaten up with a vanity that was almost insane, and he was as proud of his capacity for serious oratory as he was of his talents as a buffoon.

Unfortunately the eloquence was never displayed. The King had drunk largely of the heady wine which was a favourite with the nautical customers of the

tavern, and he applied himself with equal diligence to the more refined vintages which he found on the table of Stratocles, his entertainer. The company drank his health in bumpers ; and, not to be outdone, a huge capacity for drink being, as he thought, one of his most honourable distinctions, he pledged them in return by draining a cup of a royal size. This was a final effort. He spoke a few hesitating sentences, frequently interrupted by hiccoughs, staggered, and but for the prompt attention of his attendants, who had indeed observed his condition, would have fallen to the ground. Nothing remained but to carry him out of the banqueting hall.

It was late in the afternoon of the following day before he was sufficiently recovered from the effects of his debauch to start for Jerusalem. A halt for the night was made about halfway, and late in the afternoon of the next day the cavalcade approached Jerusalem. Jason came out to meet his guest. He had done his utmost to bring a reputable company with him, but his efforts had not been very successful. The respectable part of the population of the city was conspicuously absent, a mixed multitude of strangers and half-breeds, brutal in manners and squalid in appearance, represented the Jewish nation. Fortunately it was dark, and the torchlight procession with which the King was escorted into the city did something to conceal

by its picturesque effects the general meanness of the affair. Antiochus, however, did not fail to notice the character of the gathering, and indeed rallied his host on his ragged and disreputable followers. But his good humour did not seem to be disturbed. He admired the decorations of the palace, was loud in praise of Jason's taste in art, and indeed admired one statuette so much that his host felt compelled to offer it for his acceptance, much against his will, for it was supposed to be an original by Scopas, and to be worth at least five talents. The next day came a visit to the Temple. The King shrugged his shoulders at what he was pleased to consider the tastelessness of its architecture, suggested to his host that he had better pull the whole place down and build it again in a better style, and offered him the services of his own architect and a painter who, he said, had a quite unequalled skill for such subjects as a dance of satyrs and nymphs, and would cover the walls of the new building with some really elegant designs. But if the architecture of the Temple did not please him, he expressed a genuine admiration for some of its contents. There was a greedy light in his eye as he looked at the rich furniture and gorgeous vessels—and this, though Jason, having certain views of his own, had the prudence not to show him the chamber which contained the most massive treasures of the place. But whatever Antiochus may have thought, he said nothing but what was civil and

pleasant. It may be supposed, however, that a few days of such a guest would be enough, and it was with unmixed delight that at the end of a week Jason saw him depart for Phenicé.

CHAPTER III.

MENELAUS.

Two years have passed, and the fate which Jason had declared to be beyond all limits of probability or possibility has actually overtaken him. One of his agents, named Oniah, who has assumed the name of Menelaüs, for the rage for Greek fashions still continues unabated, has outbidden him, and now reigns in his stead, occupying the palace on Mount Sion which he had been at such pains to adorn.

If we look into his library we shall see not only the books and statuettes—the silver tankards are gone, melted down into money that was wanted for some sudden exigency—but our old acquaintance, Cleon. The supple Greek was not one of those who take their friends for better, for worse. Jason was wandering about among the hills of Ammon with scarcely a garment to his back or a shekel that he could call his own, and what use could he find for the company of an accomplished gentleman, who had

as keen an eye as any one for a fine bit of sculpture or painting, and could not be rivalled, out of the profession, in his taste for wine? The accomplished gentleman knew where he was appreciated, where he was of use, and, naturally, where he was well off. Accordingly he had found means, as such people always do find means, of ingratiating himself with the new occupant of the palace, and was installed as his consulting connoisseur and chief adviser in matters of taste.

“A poor creature, certainly,” he had replied to some depreciatory criticism which Menelaüs had passed on his predecessor, “but it must be allowed that he had a taste in art.”

“Or was sensible enough to be guided by those who had,” said Menelaüs.

Cleon acknowledged the compliment with a bow, and went on, “I never found him make any difficulty about the price. And, of course, if a man goes to work in that spirit, and has good advice, too, he is bound to make a fine collection.”

Menelaüs received the observation with a grimace, and a significant shrug of the shoulders. “‘No difficulty about the price,’ you say. Of course not. Why should he? When a man doesn’t pay, he is apt to be easy about the amount. Do you know that the bills for half the things that you see in this room have been sent in to me? Sometimes he had to pay the money down. The ‘Gladiator’ there, from

Pergamum could not have been got without ready cash ; but wherever he could, he went on credit, and now the dealers are down upon me."

And he held up a sheaf of bills.

"Here," he went on, "is a pretty account from Theodotus of Alexandria, the bookseller, you know :

" <i>A Manuscript of Anacreon</i> (said to be autograph)	10 minæ.
<i>The Milesian Tales</i>	5 "
<i>Drinking Songs from Cratinus</i>	2 "

And so it goes on, with a quantity of books which I am sure the old impostor never read. Two talents and twelve minæ it comes to altogether. Then here is 'A Group of the Graces, 1 talent ;' 'Silenus, 20 minæ ;' 'Satyr and Nymphs, half a talent.' 'Set of Flagons, worked with the Labours of Hercules, 2 talents.' These the villain melted down before he went. Fancy the rascality of that ! Why, the silver by weight could not have been worth a fourth part of what it cost with the workmanship."

"Well," said Cleon, "the fellows can wait. They can afford it ; I know enough about these things to be sure that they get a very handsome profit. I used to travel, you know, for Cleisthenes of Syracuse, and so got to know something about the secrets of the trade. No, you need not be afraid of making them wait."

“ Well, they have waited three years already,” returned Menelaüs; “ and very likely will have to be out of their money for as many more. But here is a gentleman who won’t wait. Here is Sostratus” (Sostratus, it should be mentioned, was Governor of the Castle, which was garrisoned by Syrian troops, and so the representative of King Antiochus)—“ here is Sostratus asking for the half-year’s tribute, and giving me a pretty strong hint that, if I don’t send it, he shall come and take it for himself. And where is the money to come from?”

“ Well,” said Cleon, with a little laugh, “ I suppose there is one way to get milk, and that is to go to the cow, or the goat, or the sheep. You see, we have a certain choice between big and little. And so, if you want money, you must go to the people, I suppose.”

“ The people! they are squeezed absolutely dry, at least one would think so. I could tell you stories about the squeezing that would make you split your sides with laughing. There was old Levi, a Bethlehem farmer; they boiled him, or half-boiled him, because he would not pay his taxes—said that he couldn’t, the old villain! They put him in a caldron, you see, and kept heating it up, because he would not tell where he had hidden his money.”

“ Well, did they get it out of him?”

“ No, the obstinate old dog, he would not say a word; but before he was quite finished his wife

brought the coins from her head-dress and bought him off. They say that he was the queerest figure when he came out of the water, with the skin hanging about him in folds. Well, at all events, it was a good washing for him. He had never been so clean in his life before."

"And did he recover?" asked Menander.

"Upon my word, I can't remember. But I do know that we got the money."¹

"Well, I remember what your predecessor used to say. It was in this very room about two years ago that I asked him whether he felt quite safe. 'Oh, yes!' he answered, 'I have got the last farthing that is to be got, and there is an end of it!'"

"Well," replied the high priest, "there are other ways of getting money besides taxes. I will allow that Jason worked the taxes as well as a man could. No one can eat or drink, lie down or get up, walk or ride, travel or stay at home, be born or marry, or be buried, without having to pay for it. No! I do not see room for another, and I am sure that it is not for want of looking. But, as I said, there are other ways. Now—can you keep a secret?"

"A secret! I should say so—not the grave itself better!"

"Hush! my friend, good words! good words!"

¹ "He came with the King's mandate, bringing nothing worthy the high priesthood, but having the fury of a cruel tyrant, and the rage of a savage beast" (2 Macc. iv. 25).

cried the high priest, who felt, or affected to feel, the common Greek superstition against words that seemed to carry an evil omen with them. "Well, if you can, come here."

So saying, Menelaüs took his friend into an adjoining room, and opening a cupboard, secured, as the Greek observed, by an iron door and by a lock of elaborate construction, showed him a number of massive gold vases.

"And where do these come from?" asked Cleon, almost dazzled by the splendid array.

"Where should they come from, but from the Temple? Some of these have got a history of their own. You see that two-handled cup? King Artaxerxes gave it to Nehemiah: solid gold. And you see those splendid sapphires in the handles? The very biggest stones of the sort I have ever seen, and worth three talents each. Then there is that salver, Alexander of Macedon gave it to the Temple; and that casket there was a present from the first Ptolemy."

"But, my dear sir," said the Greek, astonished at the audacity of the whole affair, "is not this going a little too far? Suppose the people were to find it out? Would there not be a rather formidable uproar?"

"Well, of course; we cannot get anything without risk. But I have taken precautions. First, I have put a facsimile of every one of these in the Temple;

gilded lead, which does perfectly well for all practical purposes."

"But the weight! Surely any one can tell the difference by the weight."

"Of course, my dear Cleon, I know that lead is little more than half as heavy as gold. But there are ways of making it up. You can put a great deal more metal in, without its being observed, and almost make up the difference. And, you see, the things are never allowed to be handled; can only be looked at. I have given very strict orders about that, you may be sure. Of course the treasurer is in the secret; but as he must sink or swim with me, he may be trusted. Besides, I am not going to run the risk of keeping them here. I can trust you, my good Cleon, as I can my own brother—in fact, when I come to think of it, a good deal more—yet I am not sure that I should have told you so much, but that the best of these are going to be packed off to-night. The fact is, they are sold already."

The Greek could only shrug his shoulders and say nothing. As my readers will have perceived, he was not a man of high principles—in fact, to put the matter plainly, he was an unscrupulous adventurer. But the reckless villainy of Menelaüs fairly disgusted him. His taste, quite apart from any question of principle or honesty, revolted at the notion that a man, placed as was the high priest of the Jewish people, should deal with these historic

treasures as a vulgar burglar might deal with them. This was a refinement of feeling into which the vulgar cupidity of Menelaüs did not enter. He went on :

“ How wild that scoundrel Jason would be, if he knew of this, to think that he had lost such an opportunity, had these treasures in his hand, so to speak, and leave them to his worst enemy ! ”

“ Have you heard anything lately about him ? ” asked the Greek, not unwilling to change the subject.

“ Oh, yes,” replied Menelaüs, “ he is wandering about somewhere in the country of the Ammonites, and at his wits’ end, I am told, how to live.”

“ Poor fellow ! ” said Cleon, *sotto voce*, “ he was always very kind to me, and I can’t help being sorry for him.” He then went on aloud, “ He will find it a great change from his way of living here.”

“ Yes, yes ! ” said Menelaüs ; “ but still, some of his old ways and habits will come in usefully. He was always great about training, you remember. Every one should be ready to fight a boxing-match or run a race. Cold, hunger, fatigue ; these, he used to say, are the things to bring out a man’s muscles. And now he has got them in perfection. He might really carry off some prize, only, unluckily, he is getting a little too old for that sort of thing. And then, you recollect, how he would go on about the

beauty of the human form. Clothes, especially the gorgeous clothes of our people, obscured so tastelessly its magnificent proportions. Well, he has not much to complain of, I imagine, on that score. By the last account that I had of him he had as little in the way of clothing as a man could well have. Anyhow, he may console himself with thinking that *his* magnificent proportions are not obscured. Well, I don't pity him. A man who has managed to get into a good place and then cannot stick to it is nothing better than a fool, and richly deserves everything that he may get."

At this point in the conversation a servant announced the arrival of a message from Sostratus, Governor of the Castle.

"All the gods and goddesses confound the man!" cried the high priest, in a rage. He was fond of garnishing his conversation with a little Greek profanity. "Another dunning message, I suppose. Well, he must wait. No man can get any water by squeezing out of a dry sponge; and that is about what I am!"

The communication from Sostratus proved, however, to be on quite another subject, though it was, if possible, even more unwelcome. It ran thus:—

"*Sostratus, Vicegerent of the Divine King, Antiochus, to Menelaus, the High Priest, greeting.*

"Know that I have this day received the summons of the Divine King, Antiochus, to attend him at his court at Antioch, within the space of thirty days, there to inform his Highness more fully of affairs

concerning his province of Judaea. Know also that your presence is required at the same place and time, whereof the writing herewith enclosed, being sealed with the King's seal, will be proof sufficient. Farewell."

Menelaüs's face visibly lengthened as he read this epistle. "By the dog!" (this was a Socratic oath which he sometimes affected, as giving to his conversation a certain philosophic tinge)—"By the dog! this is worse than being dunned! I like not a journey to Antioch. A very pretty place, but expensive, dreadfully expensive, especially when one has the honour of being entertained by the King."

Cleon felt a certain pleasure in the high priest's discomfiture. The new patron was more overbearing, less considerate, and generally more difficult to get on with than the old. Jason, coxcomb as he was, had always been kind, and Cleon felt as kindly for him as it was in his nature to feel for any one. And then the exquisite propriety with which this disturbing news followed the man's taunts and boasts was irresistible.

"It is hard," he said, as if to himself, "when a man has got into a good place——"

Menelaüs darted an angry look at his friend, but the Greek's face, which he knew how to keep under admirable control, expressed nothing but respectful sympathy. There was an unpleasant suggestion of mockery in what he had heard; but the Greek was

a useful person ; he had been trusted, too, and knew things which it would not do to have published. Altogether, the high priest concluded, it would not do to quarrel with him—anyhow, for the present ; some day, perhaps, he might be got rid of.

“ I suppose, sir, you cannot make an excuse—important affairs of State, the King’s service to be attended to, or something of that kind ? ”

Cleon made the suggestion, knowing perfectly well that it was quite out of the question. But he enjoyed the novel position of tormenting his patron, and was taking it out, so to speak, for not a few rudenesses and slights.

“ Excuse ! ” cried Menelaüs. “ It would be as much as my head is worth to do anything of the kind. No ! I must go. But this is not a journey which one cares to take empty-handed. Let me see what I can take—two or three of the most portable cups, as much coin as I can scrape together, and the jewels—jewels are always useful : it is so easy to hide them. Well, I shall leave you in charge ; unless, indeed, you are very much set on going yourself.”

Cleon was not at all set upon going ; on the contrary, nothing short of the strongest inducements would have persuaded him to the journey. Going to Antioch was like putting one’s head into the lion’s mouth. There was no particular reason, indeed, why *his* head should be bitten off ; but lions are

capricious, and sometimes use their teeth for the mere fun of the thing.

“I am much obliged for the chance,” he said, “but my health has been suffering lately, and I do not feel quite equal to the journey.”

“Well, then,” replied Menelaüs, “stop here, and keep things as straight as you can. And if you can sell some of these pretty things for ready money, do so—the usual commission for yourself, of course. But it must all be kept quiet.”

The next day the high priest and the Governor, neither of them in very good spirits, were on their way to Antioch.

CHAPTER IV.

AT ANTIOCH.

ANTIOCH more than deserved the praise of “a very pretty place,” which Menelaüs had bestowed upon it. In fact, it was one of the finest cities of the world. The old town which the first Antiochus¹ had found had been improved away by him and his successors. All that could be done by a despotic power that made very short work with the wishes and even the rights of private owners of property, and by a lavish expenditure of money, had been done by five generations of rulers, and the result was magnificent. Broad streets ran from side to side; and those who grumbled that the narrow alleys of the old town gave at least a shelter from the sun were consoled by the rows of planes and limes, planted alternately, which shaded both sides of each thoroughfare. Rows of houses, which looked more like palaces than private dwellings,

¹ Son and successor of Seleucus Nicator, the first of the dynasty of the Greek Syrian kings.

occupied the best quarter of the city, and even the poorest regions had nothing of the squalor of poverty. Even the filth so common in the East was conspicuously absent from Antioch, for every gutter ran with an unceasing stream of water, drawn from a higher point of the Orontes and carrying into that river at a lower point all the defilement of the streets. Temples, in which a whole pantheon of gods was worshipped, were to be seen on every hand. The pure and harmonious outlines of Greek architecture could be seen side by side with the *bizarre* conceptions of Oriental art. If the kings and their Greek subjects worshipped Zeus and Apollo, and, above all, Aphrodité, who had here her famous grove of Daphne, so the Syrian population were faithful to Baal and Ashtaroth. A magnificent amphitheatre, capable of holding at least thirty thousand spectators, rose, a striking mass of white marble, on the north side of the city; a colonnade ran round the four sides of the market-place, gorgeous with the lavish colours of the East, for here the art of Greece had been superseded for once by the more ornate native taste. But the river, rushing down between its noble embankments of stone, was the chief ornament of the place. The Orontes had not gathered round it the splendid associations that clustered about the Tiber, but its broad, clear stream was in everything else more than a match for its Italian rival.

Menelaüs and his companion, who, it may be guessed, had reasons of his own for regarding with anxiety the summons that brought him to the capital, were not a little relieved to find that the King had been called away by urgent affairs.

Tarsus, one of the most important cities in his dominions, had rebelled. Its antiquity, its wealth, and its fame as a seat of culture, a character in which it claimed to be a rival of Athens itself, had combined to give the Tarsians a high opinion of themselves. Successive rulers, beginning with the Assyrian kings, its first founders, had allowed the city a certain independence ; and its pride was grievously wounded when the young King, with the reckless levity that distinguished him, handed it over as a private possession to his mistress. The citizens pitched the lady's collectors into the Cydnus, shut their gates, and defied their sovereign ; Mallos, another Cilician city which had suffered the same indignity, following their example. The King had marched to reduce the rebels—a task, it was probable, of no little difficulty—leaving a certain Andronicus to act as his deputy, and specially to dispose of the charge on which Menelaüs and Sostratus had been summoned.

This charge was one of a very formidable kind. Menelaüs's dealings with the treasures of the Temple had not been so secret as he had hoped. Such things cannot be done without a certain

number of confederates, and such confederates are very apt to give a finishing touch to their villainy by betraying their chief. In this instance one of the journeymen employed had considered himself insufficiently paid, rightly thinking, perhaps, that if sacrilege can be recompensed at all, it ought to be recompensed handsomely. Personally he was too insignificant to venture an attack on so great a potentate as the high priest, but he knew whither to carry his information. He told what he knew to a priest, who, besides being a devout Jew, was a member of the family to which the high priesthood properly belonged. The priest, after satisfying himself that the story was true, at once set about bringing the offender to justice.

His course was plain. Menelaüs, we have seen, had supplanted Jason, and Jason had himself purchased the dignity. But Oniah, the rightful high priest, who had been displaced by Jason, was still alive. Antiochus, naturally fearing his influence with his countrymen, had kept him at his capital, treating him, strange to say, with remarkable consideration. But Oniah was one of those men who extort veneration even from the most reckless of profligates. His venerable figure, his face beaming with benevolence, his blameless life, and the charities which he dispensed up to and even beyond the limit of his means, had won for him the regard of all Antioch. Even the heathen would stop him in the

streets and beg his blessing. Oniah was a power in Antioch for which even the reckless young profligate on the throne had an unfeigned respect.

It may, then, be easily imagined that no little sensation was produced when this venerable personage appeared before Antiochus, and, in the presence of the Court, accused Menelaüs, whom he had steadfastly refused to acknowledge as high priest, of having embezzled much of the treasure of the Temple at Jerusalem. That Oniah, whose veracity and good faith were beyond all question, should make such a charge was *prima facie* evidence of its truth. As he was known to have many friends in Jerusalem, it was more than probable that evidence would be forthcoming. The King did not hesitate a moment in acting upon this probability. Of course, he did not look at the matter in at all the same light as that in which it was regarded by the devout Oniah. To the dispossessed high priest the robbery of the sacred vessels was a monstrous sacrilege, an offence of the deepest dye, not only against his country but against his God. Antiochus felt that it was he who had been wronged. The treasures of the Jerusalem Temple were *his* treasures. He might be content to leave them, at all events for the present, where they were ; but they must be ready to his hand whenever the occasion should arise, and any one who presumed to appropriate them was a traitor and a villain. Hence the urgent summons to

Menelaüs and to Sostratus, who, as Governor, could hardly fail, thought Antiochus, to have been cognizant of the whole proceeding.

Almost immediately after the despatch of the summons came the trouble with Tarsus. The King started to chastise in person his rebellious subjects, and left, as we have said, Andronicus in general charge of affairs, and with a special commission to hear the accusation which Oniah was bringing against Menelaüs. The choice was an unlucky one. Antiochus was sincerely anxious that justice should be done in the matter ; but to get justice done in any particular case when it is not the rule of the administration is exceedingly difficult. Andronicus, to put the facts quite simply, was an unprincipled villain, ready to sell his decisions, when he could do so with impunity, to the highest bidder. He was an old acquaintance and confederate of Sostratus, and Menelaüs, who had established friendly relations with the Governor during their journey from Jerusalem to Antioch, soon received a hint as to how he should proceed. The hearing of the case had been appointed for the sixth day after his arrival. Before that date one of the sacred vessels which he had taken the precaution of bringing with him, had been exchanged for five hundred gold pieces, and the gold pieces had found their way into the pocket of Andronicus.

On the day appointed Oniah, supported by the

principal Jewish inhabitants of Antioch and by not a few of the most respectable Greeks, appeared to substantiate his charges against the usurper Menelaüs. The evidence appeared to be overwhelming. The artizan who had been employed to fabricate the worthless imitations of the precious vessels told the whole story of the fraud with a fulness of detail which seemed to bear all the stamp of truth. Another witness related how he had carried one of the original articles to a goldsmith at Sidon, and actually produced a rough memorandum of its weight, which had been made upon the spot, to be afterwards embodied in the formal receipt.

The line of defence adopted was bold, not to say impudent. The whole affair, according to Menelaüs, was a conspiracy on the part of the irreconcilable Jews to overthrow a loyal subject of the King. The witnesses, he declared, had been suborned, the documents had been forged. He then went on to bring a counter-charge against his accuser. And here he found a certain advantage in the transparent honesty of Oniah.

“Do you acknowledge,” he asked the ex-high priest, “the validity of the appointments which our most noble lord Antiochus has made to the office of high priest?”

Oniah frankly confessed that he did not.

“Do you consider yourself to be still, according to the Law, in rightful possession of that office?”

“I do.”

“And bound to assert that right?”

“By lawful means.”

“And you hold all means to be lawful that are enjoined in the Law of Moses?”

“I do.”

“And among such means you would count the banishment from the precincts of the Holy City of all such as do not worship the Lord God of Israel?”

Oniah felt that he was becoming entangled in this artful web of questions, and made an effort to break loose. “I appeal,” he cried, “most excellent Andronicus, to all who, in this city of Antioch, for these four years past have known my manner of life. You see sundry of them, nor of my own nation only, in the court this day. Ask them whether I have not lived in all peace and quietness, not seeking to disturb, either by word or deed, the dominions of my lord the King.”

Menelaüs, of course, had not come unprovided with witnesses. The old man had, to tell the truth, used language of an imprudent kind. He was a patriot and a believer. As such, he had his beliefs and his hopes, and it was part of his character to express such beliefs and hopes quite openly. He had talked of a day when the Holy Land should be no more the prey of the alien and the heathen, when a king of the House of David should rule in Mount Sion, when the Temple should regain all the sacred-

ness and all the glory which had ever belonged to it. Such language, construed strictly, was not consistent with a thorough loyalty to the Syrian monarch. But no one who knew Oniah, a man of peace who had the good sense to recognize what was and what was not possible, could suppose that any scheme of revolt against existing authorities had ever entered into his mind. In fact he had not said a word that had not been said before by one or more of the prophets. Still, words which breathed a spirit of independence, when reported by witnesses, and acknowledged by Oniah—who was, indeed, too honest to deny them—gave Andronicus the occasion for which he had been looking. He gave his decision in the following terms:—

“The charge against Menelaüs is postponed for further hearing. Meanwhile the documents produced and the witnesses will remain in the custody of the Court. As for Oniah, he must be reserved for the judgment of the King in person. I should myself have been disposed to release him; but in the absence of my lord, considering that the peace of the realm is so essentially concerned, I do not venture so far.”

He was proceeding to give orders for the removal of Oniah, when an ominous murmur from the audience, with which the court was crowded, made him pause. Prisoners who saw the inside of an Antioch dungeon were sometimes not heard of again. The

air had a certain power of developing very rapid diseases, so rapid that the sufferers were not only dead but buried before any tidings of the sickness reached their friends. Antioch was not disposed to see the man who was probably the most widely respected of all its inhabitants, exposed to such a risk. Andronicus, who could not even trust the soldiers to act against so venerable a person, drew back. He was willing, he said, to accept sureties in a sufficient amount for the due appearance of the accused. The sureties were forthcoming in a moment, in sums so great and so absolutely secure that Andronicus had no pretext for refusing them. He proceeded to adjourn the Court for fourteen days.

During the interval he took the opportunity of making a change in the garrison of the capital. Troops recruited from some of the regions bordering on Judæa, and accordingly among the bitterest enemies of its people, replaced some Greek mercenaries. The strangers knew nothing about Oniah, except that he was a Jew, and, being a Jew, of course hateful. They could be relied upon to obey orders, and those who knew Andronicus were sure what orders he would issue.

Oniah's friends urged him to fly. He was too old and feeble, he replied ; it would be better for him to die at his post. Then they implored him to take sanctuary.

“What!” he cried, “take sanctuary in a heathen temple! There is none other in the place. I would sooner die a thousand times.”

It was not in a temple, they explained, that he was to find shelter. It was in the Gardens of Daphne that they wished him to take refuge. And they proceeded to unfold an elaborate argument, the gist of which was that the Gardens were a civil, and not a religious, sanctuary; that there would be no occasion for him to enter the consecrated enclosure; he would be simply availing himself of a custom which forbade the entrance of the Minister of Justice into a place devoted to the amusement of the people. It is probable that they strained their argument beyond the limits of the truth. It was with great difficulty that Oniah could be made to yield. When he did so at last, on the urgent representations of his friends that the hopes of a free Israel were largely dependent on the preservation of his life, he could not help foreboding that the concession would not profit either himself or them.

The world scarcely contained a more beautiful place—beautiful both by grace of nature and diligence of art—than the Gardens of Daphne; and certainly none that seemed more unlikely to shelter a devout Jew. Its avenues of cypress and laurels, its delicious depths of shade, its thousand streams, clear as crystal and untouched by the drought of the longest, most fiery summer, were but a part of its

charms. Of some, perhaps the chief of its attractions, it is best not to speak; but there were others, less unseemly indeed, but such as must have been absolutely scandalous to such a man as Oniah. The curious thronged to see the gigantic statue of Apollo, a match both in size and costliness of material to that of Zeus in the plain of Olympia. (It was sixty feet in height, and wrought of gold and ivory.) To complete the resemblance to the famous meeting-place of the Greek race, there was a running ground and rings for wrestling and boxing. Finally, Daphne claimed to rival another great centre of Greek life in its special characteristic. It was stoutly maintained that the Apollo who haunted the laurel-groves of Daphne was as true a prophet as he who spoke through the lips of Pythia at Delphi. Crowds of men and women, eager to learn the secrets of the future, came to the groves of Antioch. The method by which they saw into the secrets of fate seemed singularly simple. The questioner dipped a laurel leaf into the stream that flowed by the shrine, and lo! the surface appeared written over with the intimations of fate. Simple it was, but the priests had spent a world of pains in acquiring the art of invisible writing, and they did their best to learn something about the history and prospects of the applicants.

Such was Daphne, and no one could be more astonished than were its inhabitants and visitors

at the strange figure whom they saw before them ; strange to the place, indeed, rather than to them, for Oniah, as has been said, was one of the best-known personages in Antioch. The rumour of his coming had gone before him, and a crowd, half curious, half respectful, had gathered to meet him. In not a few, indeed, curiosity and respect were mingled with something of fear. The presence of this austere piety in this haunt of vicious pleasure, was thought to augur ill for its prosperity. Some of the priests were heard to murmur that one who was the avowed enemy of the gods ought not to be admitted. But they did not venture to deny to any one who sought them the privileges of sanctuary, while their fears were not of a kind which they could make their followers understand. They had, therefore, to acquiesce, and hope that the unwelcome visitor would bring with him no ill-luck.

A little building, as remote as possible from the central temple, had been secured for the residence of Oniah. On reaching the gardens he had to make his way to it through two dense lines of eager spectators. The temple, the shrine of the oracle, the pavilions devoted to pleasure, were for the nonce deserted. The drunkards left their wine-cup, and, stranger still, the dice-players their gaming-tables, to gaze upon the holy man. As he walked up the narrow avenue that had been left for his passage, some of the women whose venal beauty was one of

the attractions of the place, threw themselves at his feet. Unhappy creatures, they had been brought up from childhood to this life of degradation, which indeed had a certain hideous sanction of religious association about it; but they had not altogether lost the womanly veneration for goodness, and, like the Magdalen of a later time, seemed to forget themselves in its presence. The old man, unconscious of their character, or perhaps, with the Divine Guest of the Pharisee of Capernaum, ignoring it, stretched out his hands with the gesture of blessing, and, though it was technically a pollution to touch a heathen, he even laid them on some children who were almost thrust into his arms. There was hardly a heart that was not touched with this kindness, and when the priest, as he entered his new abode, turned and bade the multitude farewell, he was answered with shouts of enthusiasm.

Menelaüs and his accomplices were dismayed at the escape of the victim. A witness who knew so much, and whose word was so implicitly believed, must be silenced at any cost. To take him by force from the sanctuary was impossible. Any attempt of the kind would certainly end in disaster. But it might be possible to draw him forth by fraud. Menelaüs knew enough of the old man's character to be sure that he had gone reluctantly, and would gladly seize the opportunity of quitting a scene in which he must have felt himself so much out of place. Some such

fraud it would not be difficult to contrive with the help of Andronicus. Accordingly another of the sacred vessels found its way to the dealer, and another purse of gold into the pocket of the viceroy, and in a few hours the plot was arranged. As Antiochus was on his way back from the north, there was no time to be lost.

Two days after the arrival of Oniah at the gardens a visitor to him was announced. It was the viceroy himself.

“Venerable sir,” he began, “it has grieved me beyond measure to find that you were distrustful of my honourable, and I may say friendly, intentions concerning you. Whoever accused me of ill-will towards you has wronged me most foully. And let me add that you also have been wronged no less in that you have been persuaded to come to a place so unworthy of your dignity. Your safety should be ensured, not by a sanctuary in which thieves and murderers find refuge, but by the inviolable precincts of the royal palace itself. Let me offer to you, in the name of the King, the hospitality of his abode. In the meanwhile I am willing to swear by any oaths that may suffice to satisfy you and your friends, that you shall suffer no injury from my hands.”

One or two of Oniah’s friends strongly dissuaded him from trusting himself to the viceroy. But their caution was overborne by their companions and by the eagerness of the priest to quit so uncongenial a

place. Andronicus took every oath known to Greek or Jew that he would treat the priest with all respect, and Oniah gladly bade farewell to the Gardens. His departure was made at the dead of night, and unknown to any of the inhabitants of Daphne. Had they been aware of his intention, it is probable, knowing as they did the character of Andronicus, that they would have hindered it by force.

Almost at the moment of Oniah's arrival at the palace a runner reached it from the King announcing his intended arrival on the next day.

Speedy action was necessary, and Andronicus, though not without misgivings, determined to lose no time. A Court of Justice, so called, was hastily held. A creature of his own was called to preside over it. Witnesses whose testimony had been carefully prepared, deposed to preparations for rebellion to which Oniah had been privy, and to which he had lent his aid. The accused was not allowed to have an advocate, and scarcely even permitted to speak. Two hours sufficed for this mockery of a legal process, and two more for carrying into effect the sentence of death which was of course pronounced. Though the brutal Cilicians who formed the garrison of the palace were ready to carry out any order which their officer might give, it was judged well to avoid anything like a public execution. That very night Oniah was poisoned in his

prison, and before dawn the next day his body was hastily consigned to the tomb.

The punishment for this atrocious act of treachery and cruelty was not long delayed. One of the first acts of Antiochus, after his return to his capital, was to demand the presence of Oniah, and then the story had to be told. Andronicus did his best to put such a colour upon it as would deceive his master. The attempt was vain. The King saw in a moment through the idle charges which had been brought against the dead man. “What!” he cried, “Oniah rebel against *me*!” His vanity and self-confidence made the accusation seem the very height of absurdity.

“Of course,” the King went on—“of course he did not acknowledge the priesthood of Jason or Mene-laüs; he has told me so himself twenty times. He could not think otherwise, and he was as honest as the day. I only wish that he had left another as honest behind him. Zeus and all the gods of heaven and hell confound me if I do not avenge him to the uttermost. Tell me,” he cried, turning to the captain of the Cilicians, who stood by dismayed at his master’s rage—“tell me where you have buried him.”

The captain described the place.

“I will see him once more, and these villains shall see him too,” he said, pointing to the trembling pair, Andronicus and his creature the judge.

He went on foot, his royal dress discarded for a mourner's cloak. His courtiers followed him, and a guard of soldiers behind brought with them the guilty viceroy and judge.

“Open the grave,” he said, when he reached the spot.

It was soon done, for the murderers had hurried their victim into a shallow tomb. In a few minutes the body of the dead man was exposed to view. Decay had not commenced, and death had given fresh depth and beauty to the serenity which had been their habitual expression in life. Antiochus gazed awhile at the face ; then, dropping on his knees, covered his head with his mantle, and burst into a passion of tears.

In a few minutes he rose to his feet. Grief had given place to rage, and his eyes blazed with fury.

“Bind that wretch !” he cried, pointing to the wretched Andronicus.

He was bound, and stood waiting his doom.

“He is not worth the blow of an honest sword,” cried the King ; “strangle him, as if he were a dog. But first make him look at the man whom he has murdered.”

Andronicus was forced to the edge of the grave and compelled to look at the dead. A halter was thrown round his neck, and the next moment he was a corpse. The judge shared his fate. “And you, sir,” said the King, turning to the captain who

had administered the poison—"you, sir, though you are a barbarian, and know no better, must learn that you cannot rob the world of one who was worth a thousand such brutes as you. You are captain no more ; that is your successor," and he pointed to an officer in his train. " You can groom his horses, if you don't want to starve. And think that you are lucky that you keep your head."

So the good Oniah was avenged.

CHAPTER V.

THE WRATH TO COME.

A YEAR has passed since the tragedy related in the last chapter. Menelaüs, thanks chiefly to the fickle temper of Antiochus, had escaped the fate which overtook his accomplice Andronicus, and had returned to pillage his unfortunate countrymen in Palestine. But his lease of power had come to an end. Jason, his dispossessed rival, had taken the opportunity of a report that Antiochus was dead, and attacked him. There could hardly be any choice between the two men. Both were equally rapacious; equally unfaithful to their religion and their country. But Jason had been out of power for two years, and his misdeeds had faded a little from the memory of the people; Menelaüs's enormities were still fresh in their recollection. After a sharp conflict, the losses of which were utterly out of proportion to any gain that could possibly come from it, Jason had won the day, and his rival had

been compelled to take refuge in the Castle. Then came the news that the report of the death of Antiochus was false. He had settled affairs in Egypt after his liking, and was now on his way northwards, furious at the trouble which this obstinate province was giving him, and resolved, as he said, to quiet it for good. Jason had fled in headlong haste, and his partisans, and, indeed, most of those who had the means to go, had followed his example. Meanwhile Jerusalem was awaiting the future with fear and trembling.

It is an evening in the early summer, and the western wall of the city is crowded with men and women, who are gazing with awe-stricken faces on the strange appearance of the sunset. All day people had been talking of the marvellous shapes which had appeared the evening before in the western sky, and now a great multitude had assembled to see whether the marvel would be repeated, and, if so, to judge of it for themselves. Nor had they assembled in vain. Never, within the memory of man, had the heavens worn a stranger, a more terrifying look. Above the spot where the sun was just sinking to his rest the whole sky glowed with a red and angry light. On this background, so to speak, the clouds of a lower stratum had shaped themselves into the forms of two armies ready to engage in battle. The spectators seemed to be able to trace in one place the serried ranks of infantry, in

another the massed array of chariots and horses. A space, brilliantly coloured, as it might seem, with something like the hue of blood, intervened between the two airy hosts. But these seemed to be slowly nearing each other, and the gazing people watched the lessening space, expecting, one might think, to hear the actual clash of arms when they should have met. But then the sun set, and with the sudden failing of light that marks the evening of more southern climes than ours, the whole pageant vanished from before the eyes of the spectators.

Among the crowd is our old acquaintance Menander, or Micah, whom we last met in the library of Jason. Things have not gone well with him since then. He had cherished a belief that Greek culture, the brightness of Greek literature and art, would do something to amend the severity, and what he was pleased to call the tastelessness of Jewish life. To a certain extent it had been an honest belief, though the pleasure-loving nature of the man, in its revolt against the stern morality of the Law, had had something to do with developing it. But his experience of Greek culture and its works had not been encouraging. If the reforming doctrine had to be preached by such prophets as Jason, and Menelaüs, and the cruel and profligate young tyrant Antiochus, it was more than doubtful whether it would do any good. Hitherto, certainly, it had done no good at all. The people were more unhappy, more spirit-

less, more like slaves than they had ever been before; the rulers were more greedy and selfish, more absolutely careless of all that did not concern their own interests. Might he not, he began to think to himself, have made a mistake? Might not the old life, which was at least the life of free men, be better than the new?

He was busy with such thoughts when he heard a woman's voice behind him whisper "Micah." He did not recognize it at once, but its tones were familiar to him, and they seemed to touch the same chord in his heart with which his thoughts were then busy. And the name, the old Hebrew name, that too was familiar, though it was long since he had heard it. He was "Menander" to his friends; for his friends were either Greeks, or else Jews who, like himself, had cast off the associations of his birth and race.

"Micah," said the voice again, and he turned to look at the speaker.

She was a woman of some thirty years, plainly, almost poorly, dressed, but with all the air of gentle birth and breeding. Her face was beautiful, not with the brilliant loveliness of youth, but with that which is brought into the features by a pure and tender soul. There were the lines of many sorrows and cares upon her forehead, and round her eyes, and in the corners of mouth and cheek; but her eyes, save that they seemed almost too large for the

thinner contours of the face, were as beautiful as they had been in the first glory of her youth.

It was Hannah, his elder sister, who had been as a mother to him in his orphaned childhood, that Menander recognized. Years had passed since they met. There had been no quarrel, but circumstances had made a barrier between them. What Menander's life had been we know, and Hannah was the wife of a faithful and devout Jew, Azariah by name, who, though still cherishing kindly thoughts for his young kinsman, had felt that, for the present at least, they were best apart.

Brother and sister eagerly clasped hands, and Menander, or Micah, as we will call him, felt a lump rise in his own throat as he saw the tearful smile in Hannah's lustrous eyes.

“Micah,” she said—“for you will not mind my calling you Micah, though I hear you use another name; but you were always Micah to me—this is a strange sight on which we have been looking.”

“Yes, sister,” he answered, with a gaiety of tone which was more than half assumed—“yes, sister, strange enough; but then we know that the clouds do take strange shapes at times. A current of air blows them this way or that, and, with our fancy to help, they become anything in heaven or earth that we may fancy.”

“Nay, Micah, there is more than fancy here. You and I used to watch the clouds from the

window in the old house, and to laugh at the odd shapes which we found in them—lions, and dogs, and whales, and such things—but we never saw such a sight as this.”

“But we had not in those days such thoughts of our own to read into the sights of the skies. But tell me, Hannah, what do you think it means?”

“What can it mean,” she answered, in a low voice, “but wrath—wrath upon us and upon our children?”

“Wrath, perhaps,” he cried; “and the sky has, I must confess, an angry look. But why must it be upon us? Why not rather upon our enemies? I see nothing in the skies which tells us whether these sights be meant for us or for them.”

“Nay, my brother, speak not thus, for you know better in your heart. The heavens give us these signs, or rather God gives them to us through the heavens, but He leaves it to our own hearts to interpret them. They tell us surely enough on whom this wrath must fall.”

“But, sister, tell me why on us? Are we worse than our neighbours—than these robbers of Edomites and Ammonites, these sullen Romans, never satisfied except when they are fighting—these mongrel Syrians?”

“They are heathen,” said Hannah, in a solemn voice, “and they do not sin against light. Let us leave them to the judgment of God. But ourselves

we can judge. Look at this city ; we call it the City of David—but where is the spirit of David ? Have we not trampled the Law underfoot, making to ourselves graven images of things in heaven and earth and the water under the earth ? Where is the honour of the Sabbath ? Where is the morning and evening sacrifice ? Where are the yearly feasts ? Will our God deliver us again, when we will not thank Him for the deliverances that He hath wrought already ? Oh, Micah, I do not seek to anger you ; but are you such as our father, now in Abraham's bosom, would rejoice to see you ? And tell me, how was it that we Hebrews became a great people ? A Syrian ready to perish was our father, and lo ! before a thousand years were past, Solomon reigned from the great river to the Western sea. How came we by this might ? Was it by aping Egyptian or Greek ? Did we not keep to our own way, and walk after our own law, and worship our own God ? Then it was well with us, and the nations round about feared us and honoured us ; but now they laugh us to scorn, for we are ashamed of our own selves, and seek to be what they are, and cannot attain to it, and so fall short both of their greatness and of ours."

Micah stood dumb before this fierce torrent of words. Was this the gentle Hannah of his youth ? There must be some mighty influence that could change the lamb into the lioness.

She went on, in a gentler voice, " You are not angry with me, brother ? "

" Surely not."

" I must go, for my husband will be waiting for the evening meal. Come, children," she went on, speaking to two little girls who had been clinging to their mother's cloak, gazing open-eyed and half-terrified at this strange kinsman.

" And are these my nieces ? "

" Yes ; Miriam and Judith," answered Hannah, pointing first to one and then to the other. " This, children, is your dear uncle, Micah."

The young man stooped and kissed the children.

" You will not let it be so long before we see you again ? " said Hannah.

His answer was to wring her hand, and turn away. Her words had pricked him to the heart, and he did not know whether to thank her or be angry.

We must now turn to another group which had also been drawn to the walls by the report of the marvellous sights that were to be seen in the heavens. A group it was that would have attracted attention anywhere, so remarkable were the contrasts and the resemblances which it presented.

The principal figure was an old man dressed in the everyday garb of a priest. The burden of years had bowed his stately figure, for he had long since passed the limit which the Psalmist assigns to the

life of man, but his eye was as brilliant as ever, and his voice, when he spoke, had lost none of its depth and fulness of tone. His three companions were men in the vigour of life. All surpassed the common stature, but yet none of them equalled the height of their father, for that they were father and sons the most casual observer must have seen. In age there was little difference between them. The eldest may have numbered about forty years, the youngest, perhaps, four less. Their dress was mainly that of the middle-class Jew, and so different from the old man's priestly garb, but not without some distinctive marks that indicated the fact that they belonged to the House of Aaron. The multitude of priests was indeed so great that but a very small share in the services of the Temple, even when these were fully carried out, fell to the lot of any one man. These services had now been reduced to a minimum, and numbers of the priestly houses, while not repudiating their hereditary office, practically devoted themselves to the ordinary avocations of life. This had been done by the three sons of Mattathias of Modin, for such was the name and such the ancestral city of the aged priest.

“Judas,” said the old man, addressing one of his sons, “these signs in the heavens are of a surety from the Lord.”

The son addressed was the youngest of the three; but it was evident from the bearing of his brothers,

and from the air of respect and attention with which they waited for him to speak, that they were accustomed to see him the first recipient of their father's confidence. And indeed it was not difficult to see, under a superficial resemblance of figure and face, something that distinguished him from his companions. John, the eldest, was a plain, blunt soldier, raised above the average level of his profession, by the purity of his life and the depth of his religious convictions, but still essentially a soldier, one who saw no way of solving complicated questions save by a downright blow of the sword. Simon, the second in point of age, had a singularly mild and benevolent expression, though his eyes were full of intelligence and the lines of his mouth and chin seemed to show that he could be firm on occasion. But Judas had all the outward characteristics of a hero. A sturdier soldier never wielded sword, but he saw that there are difficulties to which the sword alone can bring no solution. Nor was he slow to follow all the subtleties of diplomacy ; but, at the same time, he never lost his grasp of the principles which all the skill of the diplomatist is unable to change.

“Father,” he now said, “that these signs are from the Lord I do not doubt. But what is your counsel ?”

“ Speak you first, my son,” replied the old man ; “ ‘tis ever best so. You might be unwilling to differ from me and yet be in the right. This at least my

years have taught me—that it is easy for any man to err."

"Let us stay," said Judas. "'Tis true the air is stifling, such as a free man can scarcely bear to breathe. But there are many, father, that look to you for counsel and guidance, and we may scarcely leave them, at least till the call sounds more plainly in our ears."

"Nay," cried John, the soldier, "I am not, as you know, one that would readily give his vote for flight. But here we are, methinks, as rats in a hole. May we not lawfully, and with good faith to God and our brethren, seek some place where we may at least have space to draw our swords and strike a blow?"

"And you, Simon, what say you?" asked the old man, turning to his second son.

"God knows that I would give much to be back at home. But our brethren need us here, and we may give them some comfort. Let us stay."

"Judas and Simon," said the old man, after a pause, "you have spoken well, and I give my voice with yours. As yet our duty seems to keep us here. When it shall call us hence, we will follow it. And you, John, think not that you will long want for an occasion to strike with the sword. It shall come; but you will be readier for it if you make no haste to meet it."

With this the little party turned away from the wall, and made their way to their lodging in the city.

CHAPTER VI.

THE EVIL DAYS.

IT was not long before the portent which the terrified crowd had watched from the walls of Jerusalem found, or at least began to find, its fulfilment, for, indeed, many days were to pass before the wretched people had drained the cup of suffering to the dregs.

First there was the actual arrival of the army, the rumour of whose approach had struck such terror into Jason. At its head came Antiochus in person, fresh from his successful campaigns in Egypt and in his train followed the renegade Menelaüs with a crowd of unscrupulous and profligate adventurers. There was no attempt at resistance. The gates were thrown open by the King's adherents in the city. But if the citizens had hoped to soften the tyrant's heart by their submissive attitude they were miserably disappointed. For days the streets of the city ran red with blood. The prominent members of the patriotic party were the first to perish. Then

came all the private enemies of the returning renegades; and then a far greater multitude who were singled out for destruction by the possession of anything that excited the cupidity of the conquerors. Lastly, as ever happens at such times, the massacre that is suggested by hatred or greed was followed by the massacre that is the result of the merest wantonness. But there were victims more unhappy than those who thus perished by the sword of the heathen. The money found on the persons and in the houses of the victims did not satisfy the cupidity of their murderers. There were thousands who had indeed nothing of their own to lose, but who were in themselves a valuable property. These were sent off in droves to be sold, till the slave-markets of the Eastern Mediterranean were glutted with the Jewish youth.

Still worse in the eyes of all pious Jews than the massacre or the captivity was the profanation of the Temple. The innermost shrine, the Holy of Holies, which the high priest himself was permitted by the Law to enter but once only in the year, was thrown open to the unhallowed gaze of a debauched heathen. With a horror that passes description the people saw the renegade Menelaüs, bound to be the guardian of the sanctity of the place, actually drawing aside the veil with his own hand, and conducting the King into the awful enclosure. They saw the most sacred treasures, gifts of the piety of many

generations, treasures to which the revenue of the Persian kings, and even of the victorious Alexander himself had contributed, become the spoil of the sacrilegious intruders. The golden altar of incense and the table of the shew-bread were taken by the King, while the seven-branched candlestick of gold fell, as was commonly believed, to the high priest himself. They saw it, and it almost overturned their faith that no visible sign of the Divine wrath followed an impiety so terrible.

So Antiochus came and went, leaving behind him as his deputy, Philip, the Phrygian, "in manners more barbarous than he who set him there." The time that followed was one of grievous depression and sadness. Life went on, as it will even amidst the gloomiest circumstances, but all the joy and brightness were crushed out of it.

Micah's sister, the Hannah whom we have seen talking to him on the wall, gave birth to a son shortly after the departure of Antiochus. No feast was held on occasion of the rite that made the little one a member of the family of Abraham. When the forty days of purification were past, the mother was not taken to present her offspring in the Temple. The Temple, the haunt of pagans and apostates, was no place for faithful sons and daughters of Abraham. A visit to its courts could hardly be the seal of purification when it needed purifying so sorely itself.

An occasion that should by right have been still more joyful was allowed to pass with the absence of festivity. A younger sister of Hannah, Ruth by name, had long before been promised to Seraiah, a friend and relative of her husband. Time after time the marriage had been postponed, under the pressure of evil times ; and when at last it was performed, not even then without sore misgivings and anticipations of evil among all the elders of the family, the celebration was of the quietest kind. Not a guest beyond the few friends who attended on the bridegroom was invited ; and it was in dead silence, not with the usual shouts of merriment and gay procession of torches, that the bride was taken to her husband's home.

And yet, as we shall see, even for these evils there was a compensating good.

Micah, though he had affected to make light of the foreboding of evil which he had heard from his sister, had really been impressed by it—so much impressed, indeed, that he had left the city for a little country house at the northern end of the Lake of Galilee, that belonged to him. He had invited his relatives to accompany him, but they had declined. Their place, they said, was at home, among their poorer brethren, where they might do something to help and strengthen. All that Micah could do was to commend them to the protection of the Greek party in the city, with whom, in spite of his

fast increasing disgust at their proceedings, he had not yet broken.

He had now returned, and he lost no time in finding his way to his sister's house. The ravages made by fire and sword were only too plainly visible as he walked along. Houses that he had known from his childhood, in which he had often been a guest, were now but blackened walls ; others were shapeless ruins. Again and again he saw on fragments of stone and plaster hideous blotches which he knew to be of blood ; and as he saw these things he cursed aloud the hands which had wrought these horrors, not without the bitterest self-reproach that his own hand might have grasped them in friendship.

It was a great relief to find that his sister's house had been spared any outrage. But when he demanded admittance in the usual way, by kicking the door, it became evident that there had been a reign of terror, and that the inmates of the dwelling were not sure that it was yet over. The door was not thrown open in the usual free fashion of Jewish hospitality, but he became aware by a slight movement of one of the closed lattices that he was being inspected from above. The inspection was apparently satisfactory, for in another minute there was a sound of undrawing bolts and unfastening chains, and the inhospitable door was at last open. Hannah, sadly aged in look her brother thought, met him in the hall, and greeted him with a silent

embrace. After a pause, in which she seemed to be struggling with her tears, she said—

“ Welcome, dear Micah ; while you and my husband and my children are left to me I feel that I cannot be unhappy. And perhaps you,” she added, with a wistful look in his face, “ will draw nearer to us now. But come and see my dear ones.”

She led the way to a room at the back of the house, looking out into a little garden shaded by a wide-branching fig-tree. Hannah noiselessly drew aside the curtain that served for a door, and the two stood by common consent and watched the scene that met their eyes. Azariah, the father of the family, was sitting with his back turned to them, holding on his knees a copy of the Law. On two stools at his feet sat his daughters, each holding in one hand a tablet covered with wax, and in the other a *stylus* or sharp-pointed iron pen. He was slowly dictating to them the words, “ Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one Lord,” and the little creatures were laboriously forming, not without many pauses for thought, the scarcely familiar letters.

“ Now read it, my children,” said Azariah, when the task was finished ; and one after another the sweet, childish voices repeated the well-known words. Micah, as he listened, felt himself strangely touched. Presently he heard his sister murmur to herself, “ In Thy Law will I meditate day and night,” and glancing at her face saw it illumined

with a joy which he could scarcely have believed those wasted features capable of expressing.

“ ‘Tis well, Miriam ; ‘tis well, Judith,” said Azariah to the little girls, and putting his hands upon their heads, as they stood before him, for they had risen to repeat the holy words, he repeated, “ The God of Abraham and Sarah bless you.” And then, for they were mere children after all, and not above childish rewards, gave each a ripe fig from a basket which stood on a table by his side.

The lesson being over, Hannah advanced, and her brother followed. Azariah turned and greeted the new comer not unkindly, but with a certain reserve, for he could not forget that his visitor was a Menander as well as a Micah, and that he had been the friend of the traitorous Jason, and the yet more traitorous Menelaüs. The children, after their first feeling of alarm, for a strange face was seldom seen in that home, and when Miriam, the elder, had recognized her uncle, showed no reserve in their welcome. They clung about his neck, and kissed him. They insisted on his coming to see their pets—Miriam’s turtle-doves, and Judith’s dormice, and the little gazelle fawn which they owned in common. “ They have not heard a word against me,” thought Micah to himself ; and this affectionate loyalty touched him to the heart. From his sister he might, perhaps, have expected it, but that the stern Azariah, a narrow-minded bigot, without a kindly thought for

any that did not walk in his way, as he had been accustomed to think of him—that Azariah himself should have dealt with him so mercifully, was a surprise as it was also a reproach.

He stopped with them for the rest of the day, and after the evening meal, when the little ones had gone to bed, after making their uncle promise that he would soon come and see them again, the three had much serious talk together.

Micah had, of course, the family history to hear, for, stranger as he had been to them for some years past, he knew scarcely anything about it. He learnt now for the first time that a little boy had been born who, had he lived, would have been about two years younger than Judith. The mother had much to say about his beauty and goodness, and his rare promise of intelligence. Micah was touched all the more because he could not forgive himself for the alienation which had prevented him from saying a word of comfort to his sister in the hour of her bereavement. “It was, indeed, a terrible loss,” and he rose from his seat and kissed her. He felt that this little proof of his love would be better than many words.

“Nay,” she said, with a cheerfulness that almost startled him—“nay; you must not say that we have lost our dear little Joshua. I know that I have a son still, though he is not here. I confess that it was very hard to part with him. But he is quite

safe in Abraham's bosom, safer and better off," she added, with a sad smile, "than he would be here; and some day I shall see him, and show him to you, dear Micah, and we shall be happy together."

After this the little party had much talk about the state of things in the present, and the prospects of the future. Again Micah was astonished to see the cheerfulness and courage which his sister and her husband kept up in the midst of circumstances which must have been most disheartening.

"Ah!" said Azariah, when the conversation turned upon the desolation of the Temple, and the loss of all the ceremonial of worship, the daily sacrifice, and the great festivals of the year—"Ah! there are consolations even here. Perhaps we thought too much of these things in the old time. We were taken up with the outside, with the show and the splendour, the vessels of gold, and the clouds of incense smoke as they curled about the pillars and the roof, and we forgot what they meant. But now that the outside things are taken from us, we can give our hearts to that which is within. We have our gatherings still, though the Temple doors are shut. Every Sabbath-day we meet, and the Law and the Prophets are read in our ears—aye, and there are those who can expound them, and speak words that comfort and strengthen us. I, myself, have felt the Spirit move me once or twice to exhort and cheer the brethren. No, brother! believe me,

it is not wholly loss that we cannot assemble any more in our beautiful house. Our fathers learnt much when they sat mourning by the waters of Babylon, and we also are learning much in this our second captivity."

This sounded strange to the young man, who, indeed, had dulled his understanding of spiritual things by his follies and excesses. Still he could not help feeling deeply impressed by the evident earnestness of the speaker. But he felt that he could say nothing. A trifler and unbeliever like himself could only remain silent in the presence of thoughts and feelings so much higher than anything to which he could reach.

After a short pause Azariah went on—"The Lord has not seen fit to renew among us the spirit of prophecy, and we know not certainly of the things that are coming upon the earth. Yet a man, though he be no prophet, may read the signs of the times. Believe me, there are days to come more full of evil and darkness even than those that we have seen. My heart sometimes fails me when I think of this dear woman," and as he spoke he laid his hand upon his wife's shoulder, "and of the little ones whom God has given us. It will be a hard time for men to battle through—but for women and children—." And his voice faltered.

Hannah turned to him with her brave, cheerful smile—"As thy days, so shall thy strength be.' The

great prophet said it, did he not, to all his people—to the weak ones as well as to the strong?"

Shortly after Micah took his leave. As he walked through the deserted streets he thought much of the words which he had heard that night, and still more of the cheerfulness and courage, ten times more eloquent than all words, which he had witnessed.

"Is all this a delusion?" he asked himself. "Six months ago, perhaps even six hours ago, I should have had little doubt in saying so. But now—well, if it is a delusion, it is strangely like a reality. Anyhow its effects are real enough. Dear Hannah! always the best and kindest of sisters, but a timid creature, whom I used to amuse myself by frightening. But now—she is as bold as a lioness. Well, I can only hope that the truths which I have been learning, if they are truths, will stand me in as good stead when the need comes."

CHAPTER VII.

THE DARKNESS THICKENS.

AZARIAH had read the signs of the times aright. The darker days had come, days so full of trouble that the unhappy people looked back to the past that had seemed so sad and gloomy as to a time of rest. Things had not been going well with King Antiochus, for the Romans had driven him out of Egypt, and in his rage and fear he turned against his Jewish subjects with greater ferocity than ever. One of his motives was the brutal desire to wreak upon the feeble the vengeance which he could not exact from the strong; the other was a genuine fear lest he should lose another province as he had already lost Egypt. He saw that the policy of Rome was to stir up against him the national spirit of subject peoples, and he knew well enough that in the Jews, crushed though they had been by oppression and massacre, this national spirit was not by any means dead. Accordingly he set himself with relentless ferocity to extinguish it. Everything distinctive

of the people was to be rooted out ; that done they might become really submissive ; there would be no more a land of the Jews, but simply a province of Southern Syria.

The first thing, he conceived, would be to strike such terror into the hearts of the people that there should be no thought among them of resistance. For such a purpose nothing could be more effective than another massacre such as that which had already been perpetrated two years before under his own eyes : only this, he determined, should be more complete. He perceived with a devilish ingenuity that his orders would be more relentlessly carried out if he entrusted their execution to some one else, than if he were personally present. Appeals might be made to him to which he might yield out of sheer weariness, whereas a lieutenant, if he were only hard-hearted enough, would simply fall back upon the orders which he had received, and refuse all responsibility save that of seeing that these were fully carried out.

Such a lieutenant he knew that he possessed in the person of a certain Apollonius, a Cretan mercenary, who had already given proofs enough that he was about as little troubled as any man could be with a conscience or with feelings of compassion. To Apollonius, accordingly, the commission was entrusted, and he proceeded to execute it in a particularly brutal and treacherous way.

He marched to Jerusalem, taking with him a picked force of some five thousand men—picked, it may be said, quite as much for their unscrupulous and ferocious character, as for their strength and skill in arms. There would have been, in any case, little chance of resistance, but, to make his task the easier of accomplishment, he had so timed his coming that he approached the city two or three hours before the end of the Sabbath. Secret orders had been sent to Philip, the Phrygian, that he was to relax the severity of his rule; and the people had begun to breathe again after a long period of repression. The Temple was still shut, or virtually shut, but the synagogues were open, and were indeed frequented by throngs of fervent worshippers.

It wanted a couple of hours to sunset when the news ran through the city that an armed force was approaching the walls. The first feeling aroused by the tidings was naturally one of alarm. The appearance of the soldiers, however, was such as to disarm all apprehensions. In the first place they were more like a crowd of men who happened to be carrying arms than an army. They were not marching in ranks, or indeed keeping any kind of order. A multitude of country-folk could be seen mingled among them, soldiers and civilians walking side by side in the most friendly and unconstrained fashion. Some of the new comers recognized old acquaintances among the townsfolk, and introduced their

comrades to them ; and though some of the sterner sort stood rigidly aloof, there were quite enough among the inhabitants of Jerusalem to give the visitors a general welcome. Apollonius himself, a conspicuous figure as he rode on his white charger up and down the streets of the city, was noticeably busy in renewing old acquaintanceships and making new ones.

And then in a moment the whole scene was changed. A soldier and a citizen were standing on the wall, talking and laughing together, and that in a place where they could be seen by all observers. Suddenly, without there having been even the slightest sign of a quarrel, the soldier was seen to plunge his sword into the side of his companion. It was a preconcerted signal. The wretched inhabitants, who would have been defenceless in any case, were taken absolutely off their guard, and had but slender chances of escape. How many hundreds, possibly thousands, perished cannot be guessed. But the massacre was more general, more pitiless than that which had devastated the city two years before. Apollonius's "picked" men showed themselves altogether worthy of his choice, so brutal and blood-thirsty were they. And Apollonius himself was to be seen everywhere urging his men to make short work with these "pestilent Jews," as he called them, and not unfrequently striking a blow himself. He earned on that day such hatred that thereafter

there was not to be found a Jew, save among the vilest renegades and traitors, but uttered a curse when his name was mentioned.

Of course the soldiers had to be paid for their bloody day's work, and they were paid by the plunder of the city. The houses were stripped, and the plunderers, when they had carried away everything that had roused their cupidity, often, out of sheer wantonness, completed the work of devastation, by setting fire to the desolated houses. Altogether Jerusalem presented such a spectacle as had not been seen since the days of the Babylonian conquest.

The spirit of the people having been, as it would seem, thus effectually broken for the present, it remained to provide against its possible revival in the future.

Long gaps were made in the line of wall, so long that it took not a few days to make them, and would certainly require as many weeks to repair. The town thus made defenceless was further overawed by the erection of a fort in the City of David, this fort being held by a strong garrison of Greeks and Asiatic mercenaries.

The means of repression thus provided, the next thing was to extinguish all that was characteristic of the national life. First, the great centre of that life, the Temple, was formally desecrated. Already it had been subjected to such indignities that the pious Jew could scarcely bear to enter

its precincts. But the final horror, the “abomination of desolation,” was yet to come. On the 15th of the month Chislev (December) an altar of a Greek pattern, and consecrated to the Olympian Zeus, was placed on the great altar of sacrifice, and ten days afterwards a huge sow was slaughtered on this. Her blood, caught after the Greek fashion in a bowl, was sprinkled on the altar of incense and on the mercy-seat within the Holy of Holies—a hideous mockery of the sprinkling which the Law enjoined to be performed once in every year. From the animal’s flesh a mess of broth was prepared, and this was sprinkled on the copies of the Law. The Temple, thus dishonoured, was as if it had ceased to be.

The meeting-houses, in which, as we have seen, the people had found a substitute for the Temple worship, were summarily closed. An edict was issued commanding that every one who possessed a copy of the Law, or of any one of the sacred books, should give it up without loss of time. To call in cupidity to the aid of fear in enforcing this edict, the King’s officers were instructed to pay a reasonable price for the manuscripts thus produced. It was made a capital offence to read or to recite any part of the proscribed writings. Then the practice of circumcision was forbidden. Death was to be the penalty for all who should take any part in performing this rite—for the circumciser, the mother, the father, even the babe itself.

And then to the policy of repression Antiochus added the policy of bribery and temptation. Their own worship forbidden, the Jews were to be allured by the seductions of the worship of their masters. Hitherto little had been done in this way. Insults indeed, had been heaped upon the people: but little attempt had been made to attract them. The Temple gates, closed for more than a year, were again thrown open; and the courts, long silent, resounded with the mirth of sacrificial banquets and the gaiety of festivals. Not only all the splendours, but all the impure pleasures of heathen worship were called in to assist the attempt that was being made to sap what was left of the faith of the people.

Antiochus, who, for all his wrath at Jewish obstinacy, could not help feeling a certain respect for it, took the trouble to send among the people a missionary, if he may be so called, who was to instruct them in the new religion which their King was so anxious to impose upon them.

Theopompos, or Athenæus, to use the name which was commonly given him from his birthplace, was a follower of the philosophy of Epicurus. He had held a subordinate post, as lecturer in geometry, in the famous school of the Garden, but had found his modest income insufficient to meet his somewhat expensive tastes. If he had had but a tolerable competence, Athenæus would have made an ideal

Epicurean. He was devoted to pleasure, but there was nothing unseemly or extravagant about his devotion. For the foolish people who ruined their constitutions and emptied their purses by exhausting excesses he had a genuine contempt. “Give me,” he would say, “a decent sufficiency of ‘outside things,’ and I am content.” As he had a fair smattering of culture, and a real acquaintance with geometry, and had a venerable appearance which happily hit the mean between hilarity and austerity, he might have been, but for a chronic want of money, a real success among the somewhat *dilettante* philosophers of Athens. But circumstances were against him. Poverty did not ill become an Academic, and positively set off a Stoic; but an Epicurean seemed to have missed his vocation if he could not be always handsomely dressed and able to give elegant entertainments to his friends. Athenæus, who liked above all things to be on good terms both with himself and with every one else, felt this very acutely, and he was proportionately delighted when the Syrian King proposed to him that he should go as a teacher, not without a handsome salary, of Greek religion and Greek culture.

His success was not encouraging. In the first place he had a difficulty in making himself understood. The pure Attic Greek on which he prided himself was strange to the ears of his new audience, and he could not bring himself to descend to the

barbarous dialect to which they were accustomed. And when he was seriously called to account in the matter of his belief he found himself involved in difficulties from which he saw no way of escape. At Athens religion was politely ignored. The common people must, of course, have their gods and goddesses ; and the wise man, if he were prudent, would say nothing—anyhow in public—to disturb their belief ; but within the privileged walls of the schools the names of Zeus and Athené and Apollo were never so much as mentioned, except, perhaps, in the course of some antiquarian discussion.

Among his new disciples, as he would fain have reckoned them, Athenæus found a very different temper. They were terribly in earnest; abstractions and phrases did not satisfy them ; they pushed their questions home in a very perplexing way.

One day at the conclusion of a lecture, the customary invitation to the audience to put any questions that might occur to them was accepted by a young man who sat on one of the front benches.

“I would ask you, venerable sir,” he said, “some questions about the gods of your religion.”

“ Speak on,” replied Athenæus, with his usual courtesy ; “ I shall be delighted to satisfy you to the best of my power.”

“Are we to believe the stories that are told us in this book ?” and he held up, as he spoke, a little volume of popular mythology, filled from beginning to end

with tales that, to say the least, were not edifying. "For, if these be true, these divine beings were such as would be banished from the society of all honest men and women. They are thieves, adulterers, murderers. It would be a thousand times better to have no gods at all than such as these."

"You are right, sir," said the lecturer; "these stories are for the ignorant only, at least in their outward meaning, though they have an inner meaning also, which I will take some fitting occasion to expound. But not such are the gods whom we worship."

"Will you tell us something of them?" continued the questioner.

"Willingly, for they are such that the wisest of men need not be ashamed of them. They dwell in some remote region, serene and happy. Wrath they feel not, nor sorrow, nor any of the passions that disturb the souls of men."

"And do they care for our doings upon earth?"

"How so? They neither love nor hate; and both they must do, I take it, did they concern themselves with human affairs."

"What profit, then, is there in them? How are men the better for their being?"

"That I know not; only that it is part of the order of things that they must be."

"Far be it from me," exclaimed the young Jew, "to exchange for such idle existences the God of my

fathers ! He may smite us in His anger till we are well-nigh consumed, but at least He cares for us. He led our fathers through the sea and through the wilderness in the days of old. He has spoken to us by the prophets, and He has made His Presence to be seen in His Temple ; and though He has hidden His face from us for a time, yet He will repent Him of His wrath, and devise the means by which He shall recall His banished unto Him. No, we will not change our God for yours ! ”

A loud murmur of assent went round the benches when the speaker sat down, and Athenæus felt that he had made but small way with his audience.

Finding his theology and philosophy but ill received, Athenæus bethought him of what seemed a more hopeful method of proselytizing. Could not a specially powerful attraction be found in the festival of Dionysus, the wine-god ? Vintage feasts, he reflected, are common to every country where wine is produced, and it would not be difficult to ingraft the Greek characteristics on a celebration to which the Jews were already accustomed. Some of the less scrupulous might be tempted to take part in such a festival, a beginning would be made, and more would follow in due time. How the scheme prospered will be told in the next chapter.

CHAPTER VIII.

SHALLUM THE WINE-SELLER.

“THINGS are growing worse and worse ; only three customers yesterday, and not a single one to-day, though it must be at least an hour past noon. One would think that all the world had become Nazarites. Then, though there is next to nothing coming in, there is no stop to the going out. First comes the rascally tax-gatherer, and squeezes one as dry as a grape-skin in a press. And if, by chance, there happens to be a drop left, some snuffling priest is sure to turn up, and talk about one’s duty as a patriot and a Jew till he drags the last shekel out of one.”

The speaker was one Shallum, a Benjamite, who kept a little wine-shop in the Lower City. When he had finished his grumble, he thrust his hand into an empty wine-jar, drew from it a little leathern bag, untied the string which was round the neck, poured out the scanty contents on the counter and counted them. He knew the amount perfectly well, for he

had gone through the counting process at least ten times before that day. But when a man is desperately anxious to make two ends meet, he will measure them again and again, though he may know exactly by how much they are too short.

“Twelve shekels and ten annas! And old Nahum will be here to-morrow, asking for his thirty shekels!”

Nahum was a Lebanon wine-grower, whose long-suffering had been already tried to the utmost by the delays of the impecunious Shallum.

At this moment his meditations were interrupted by the entrance of two visitors, who had been standing, listening and watching outside the door. They were traders in a small way, who had migrated from Joppa when they heard that Greek wares were becoming the fashion in Jerusalem.

“Ho! Shallum,” cried one of them, “two cups of your best Lebanon; and make haste, for we have important business on hand.”

“Shall I draw some water fresh from the well? This is a little too warm to be used.”

“Water!” said the man. “Jew, don’t blaspheme. Mix water with our wine to-day, of all days in the year!”

“And why not to-day?” said Shallum.

“Because it is the feast of Dionysus, the wine-giver; and it would be the grossest impiety to profane his bounty with any mixture of meanner

things. Commonly his godship winks at human weakness ; but to-day it is different. May he confound me if I do him such dishonour ! ”

“ He will certainly confound you if you drink this heady wine undiluted,” muttered Shallum to himself, as he set the two cups before his guests.

“ Excellent ! excellent ! ” cried Lycon, the elder of the two Greeks, as he set down his goblet, half empty. “ But why the god vouchsafes such capital drink to these unbelieving dogs of Jews puzzles me beyond expression.”

His companion broke out into a drinking-song :

“ Fill the cup with ample measure,
Dionysus’ gift divine ;
Earth and sea hold no such treasure
As the gleaming, sparkling wine.

All for youth are love’s caressings,
Gold and gems for princes shine ;
All may share the wine-god’s blessings,
Rich and poor are glad with wine.”

Shallum was fairly tolerant, as indeed a tavern-keeper can hardly fail to be, of the ways and manners of his customers ; but to hear this praise of a false god, one of the odious demons that were worshipped by the heathen, was too much for his patience. He muttered a curse under his breath, and emphasized this expression of disgust by spitting on the floor.

“ Don’t talk to me of your gods and goddesses ! ” cried Shallum, goaded beyond all endurance, “ a

lewd, drunken crew that no respectable person would have anything to do with!"

"Come, my friend," said the Greek, "this is not the sort of talk which one expects to hear from a loyal subject of the pious Antiochus. We Greeks are not such bigots as you are, cursing every man, woman, or child that does not go exactly in our own way; but you must treat us and our belongings with respect. We are not going to have barbarians scoffing at what we think fit to worship. I have heard of men being crucified for less than you have said to-day. But hearken, Shallum, we did not come here to-day to quarrel with you. You are a good fellow, after all, and keep as capital a tap of wine as any that I know, King Tmolus¹ only excepted. We want you to come with us and have a jolly day. What is the good of quarrelling about words? You and we are quite agreed that there is something in wine that makes it one of the finest things under the sun. Suppose that we choose to call that something Dionysus the Wine-god, and you choose to say that your god has to do with it, what is the difference? We are really agreed. It is the goodness in wine that we both like, and I'm sure that a really honest fellow like you, that we can always rely on to give us the right stuff, should be

¹ The wine of Mount Tmolus, a mountain near Smyrna, before which, as Virgil says (*Georgics* ii. 184), all other wines rise as before their betters.

the first to acknowledge it. Well, can't we show an agreement? That is why we want you to come with us. A whole crowd of your countrymen are coming, I understand. It will be a pretty sight, and there will be some of the finest music that you ever heard, and dancing, and fun of all kinds, and, of course, as much wine as ever you want. Of course you will come, my dear Shallum?"

"*I come?*" growled the wine-seller. "Not I! What do I care about your dancing and singing? And as for wine, I can have as much as I want at home, and better stuff, too, than any that I am likely to get elsewhere."

Lycon, who was evidently bent on getting his way, did not suffer his good humour to be disturbed by the Jew's churlishness. "Ah!" said he, "that reminds me. Stupid fellow that I am, I quite forgot the matter of business that really brought me here. To tell the truth, business and this old Lebanon don't very well agree. But listen; Neocles, who is manager-in-chief of the whole festival, has quite made up his mind to have your wine, and none but yours, for all the better sort of people. He was to get some skins for the common folks from Zadok—do you know him?"

"Know him?" said Shallum; "I should think I did—hasn't got a drop of sound wine in his shop."

"So the Chief said. But we were to come to you for the good wine. What can you let us have?"

Mind that it must be the very best. We were not to haggle about the price, Neocles said, so long as we got it really good."

And Lycon pulled out of his pocket a money-bag that was evidently much better furnished than Shallum's lean and hunger-bitten purse. Untying the neck, he poured into his hand, with an air of careless profusion, some ten or twelve gold pieces.

Shallum's keen eyes glistened at the sight. Here was enough to pay not only Nahum but all his creditors, and leave him a handsome sum over wherewith to tide over the hard times. His somewhat brusque manner changed in a moment. He was now the most obsequious of tradesmen.

"Everything in my stores is at your disposal. And I have a better wine than this in my cellar, and only ten shekels a skin," he went on, adding about three to the utmost he expected to get. "But wait a moment, gentlemen, you shall taste it for yourselves."

He took a small flagon from beneath the counter and disappeared. The two Greeks smiled to each other. "We have the fish fast," one of them said ; "after all there is nothing like a golden bait."

Shallum shortly reappeared with the wine, which was tasted and approved.

"Well," said Lycon, "we will say ten skins of this at ten shekels a piece, and five of the other sort at eight—that is the price ; is it not ?"

Shallum nodded assent. As a matter of fact he would never have expected more than seven. But if these Greeks were so free with their money why should not an honest Jew have the benefit of it?

"Of course you will come with us?" said Lycon. "You may take my word for it, there will be nothing to offend you."

Shalium hesitated for a moment, and then muttered an unwilling "Yes."

"And you won't mind wearing this little twig of ivy, just twisted round your head? It means nothing --every one does it."

This was more than the wretched man was prepared for. "Not I," he said; "I am not going to wear any of your idolatrous ornaments."

Lycon put the money-bag into his pocket again. "Then, my dear Shallum, I am afraid we shall not be able to do any business. 'Give and take' is our motto. We put a nice little bargain in your way; and you must humour us. However, if you are obstinate, there must be an end of it. I dare say Zadok can find us what we want. Come, Callicles," he went on, turning to his companion, "we must be going."

Shallum saw his dreams of deliverance from his money-troubles vanishing into air, and grew desperate. "Stop," he said to his guests, "let me think for a moment. You won't ask me to do anything else. A few leaves can't make much odds

either way. I don't remember ever hearing anything in the Law against wearing ivy. It isn't like eating swine's flesh, or those detestable scaleless eels that you Greeks are so fond of. Yes, I'll wear the thing, if you want me to so much."

"That's right, Shallum; I thought a sensible man like you would not throw away a good chance for a mere nothing."

So saying, Lycon stepped outside the shop, and whistled. In a minute or so a cart, which had been waiting round the corner, was driven up. The skins of wine were stowed away in it, and the two Greeks, with Shallum between them, all wearing the ivy-wreath, took their seats, and started for the Valley of the Cheesemongers, where it had been arranged that the festival should be held.

The festival was scarcely a success, if it was meant, as it certainly was, to attract the Jewish population. A few hundreds, indeed, had been persuaded or compelled to be present. Most of them belonged to the lowest and most degraded class, wretched creatures whom any purchaser might secure for any purpose with a shekel or a flagon of wine. To-day they were "hail fellow well met" with their Greek neighbours, but to-morrow they would be perfectly ready to tear them in pieces. A few of somewhat better character had been bribed, as Shallum had been bribed, to come. These had little of the air of genuine holiday-makers. Their

bursts of simulated gaiety did not conceal the shame which they really felt. Others, again, did not make even this pretence of hilarity. They had been actually compelled to come, and they had all the air of prisoners led in the triumphant procession of a victorious general. Their faces were ghastly pale. Some, with their teeth firmly clenched, seemed to be forcibly keeping in the curses which struggled to find utterance. Others, of a gentler temper, were weeping silently; and others, again, preserved a look of dogged indifference. The Greek part of the spectators, who could have enjoyed the humours of the scene with a good conscience, were depressed by the presence of these unwilling guests. In consequence, everything seemed to fail. The jesters, with their grotesque garb and faces hideously smeared with wine-lees, could scarcely get a laugh from their audience; the singing lacked heartiness, the dancing was dull and spiritless. It is only natural that revellers, who find the time passing slowly, should try to quicken its movement. There was little brightness or gaiety in this feast of the wine-god, and there was therefore all the more excess. Some seized the rare opportunity of intoxicating themselves without expense, while others drank to drown their shame or their anger. Shallum, whose occupation had somewhat seasoned him against the effects of wine, remained comparatively sober, but his Greek companions were less discreet

or less strong-headed. They became, by a rapid succession of moods, boisterously gay, foolishly affectionate, and provokingly quarrelsome. It was not long before things came to a crisis. Lycon taunted the wine-seller with the quality of his wines; that did not affect him, for he was used to such complaints from his customers, and took them as part of his day's work. He scoffed at the subjection of his nation to Greek rule; Shallum still kept his temper. The tipsy Greek was only encouraged to further insults by his companion's self-restraint. He attempted to daub the Jew's face with the dregs from a broken flagon. Shallum angrily shook him off, and he reeled back, just saving himself from a fall by catching at the trunk of an olive tree. "Hog of a Jew!" he cried, "do you lay hands on a free-born Greek? Come, Callicles," he went on, turning to his companion, "let us teach the beast how to behave himself." The two rushed at the Jew, aiming blows at his head with the staves which they carried in their hands. One of them stumbled against the stones of a ruined house, and fell so heavily that he was unable or unwilling to raise himself again. Shallum easily evaded the attack of the other, dealing him at the same time so fierce a stroke of the fist that it stretched him senseless on the ground. The deed done, he looked hastily round to see whether any spectator had witnessed it. To his great relief, he

found himself alone. From the lower city came the sounds of furious revelry and the strains of the Bacchic chorus—

“ Comrades, crown the bowl with wine,
Round your locks the ivy twine,
Deeper drink and join again
Bacchus and his reeling train.”

His first impulse was to tear the ivy-wreath from his head. Then he reflected that if he could endure to wear it for a few moments longer, it might serve him as a passport. The event proved that he was right. He passed unquestioned through the crowd of revellers, left the precincts of the valley, and striking on an un frequented path, hurried on at the top of his speed, not pausing till he had put at least six miles between himself and the scene of his late adventure. Then he threw himself on the ground and bewailed his grievous fall in an agony of shame and remorse. After a while the fatigue and excitement of the day, helped by the fumes of the wine, which his rapid movements had sent to his brain, overpowered him, and he sank into a heavy sleep.

His slumbers lasted late into the day. When he woke, his head aching with the excess of the day before, he felt even more wretched, more hopeless. To return to the city was out of the question. But where was he to go? While he was debating this question with himself, and could find nothing in the

least resembling an answer, he caught the sound of approaching footsteps. Mingled feelings of shame and fear suggested to him that he should hide himself, and he plunged into the bushes which lined the side of the road.

The traveller approached. He was a renegade Jew, and Shallum recognized him as one who had taken an active part in the festivities of the preceding day. Just as he passed Shallum's hiding-place an unlucky impulse made him burst forth into a snatch of the Bacchic chant—

“Deeper drink and join again
Bacchus and his reeling train.”

His listener heard the words with mingled feelings of disgust and rage, and leaping down into the road felled him senseless to the ground.

At first it seemed as if what he had done did not make his way plainer before him. But as he stood by the prostrate man a thought occurred to him. He took the purse which the man, in the usual traveller's fashion, wore by way of girdle round his waist, and examined its contents. It held three gold pieces and some ten shekels. The gold he left; but half of the shekels he transferred to his own keeping. One of the shekels sufficed to purchase some bread and dried flesh at the neighbouring village. Thus recruited in strength the fugitive made his escape to the mountains.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PERSECUTION.

MENANDER, or Micah—the young man still wavered between the two moods which were symbolized by these names—had been greatly moved, as we have said, by what he had seen and heard in his visit to his sister and her husband. But he could not shake himself free from the habits and prepossessions of years. Though he had always kept aloof from the worst excesses of his renegade and heathen friends, still his moral tone had been lowered, and even his physical nerve weakened by a frivolous and self-indulgent life. Sometimes he would half resolve to cast in his lot with his people. Sometimes, again, the cynical or doubting temper returned. What madness it would be, so the evil voice whispered to him, to sacrifice all that made life pleasant, and, very possibly, life itself, for what both philosophers and practical men of the world agreed in pronouncing to be a delusion !

Till this question had been settled one way or the other, he found it impossible to rest. The city became odious to him, for he shrank from the sight of his fellow-men. Indeed, he did not know with whom to associate. His Greek or Greek-loving acquaintances, with their frivolities and vices, disgusted him; and the patriots regarded him with coldness and aversion. Solitude, he fancied, might suit him better, and he went again to his country house at Lebanon. But he found himself worse off than ever where there was nothing to come between his thoughts and himself, and he hastened back to Jerusalem. Then it suddenly occurred to him that his sister had been expecting shortly to become a mother, and he made his way to her house to inquire of her welfare. Azariah himself answered his knock.

“How is Hannah?”

“Thanks be to the Lord,” replied Azariah, “she is well. She had an easy travail.”

“And the babe? A son or a daughter?”

“The Lord has given us a son.”

But he said it without the gladness that a Jewish father, newly blessed with the hope that there should be one to preserve his name in Israel, should have felt.

“But you must come in and see him, for indeed he is of a singular beauty.”

The young man followed his host into the chamber already described, and sat down to wait. Presently

Azariah reappeared, holding the child in his arms. It was no father's fondness that had made him speak of his singular beauty. The child was but five days old ; but he had none of the "shapeless" look which is commonly to be seen in the newly born. His features were shaped with a regularity most uncommon at so tender an age, and his complexion beautifully clear, while his little head was surrounded with what may be called a halo of golden hair.

Micah was loud in his admiration. "I never saw his equal for beauty. You are indeed a happy father to have the fairest son in all Israel."

The smile on Azariah's face faded away.

"I would not be thankless for the 'gift that cometh from the Lord,' nor wanting in faith ; yet I sometimes cannot but think that in these days the childless are the happiest, or, I should rather say, the least unhappy."

"Of course you will be prudent," said Micah, "and yield to the necessities of the time. Put off the circumcision of the child. There can be no harm in that. And when Hannah has got her strength again, you can come down to my place in the Lebanon, and it can be done quietly, without any one being the wiser."

Azariah said nothing. He turned away his face, but not before his brother-in-law had seen his eyes fill with tears. After leaving some loving messages for his sister the young man departed, hoping,

though not without some serious doubt, that his advice would be followed.

A week after, when the question, he knew, would have been decided one way or the other, he bent his steps again towards his sister's house. As he walked through the streets he could see that the persecutors were busy at their work. Fires were burning here and there, and copies of the Law and the other holy books were being burned in them. From a house which he recognized as being the dwelling of a scribe of great learning, a party of Greek soldiers burst forth, as he passed, dragging behind them a richly-ornamented scroll of the Psalms. For a moment the wild impulse surged in his heart to rescue the sacred writing from the flames; but he recognized the hopelessness of the attempt; and, indeed, he sadly asked himself, was he fit to be a champion of holy things? A soldier gathered up the parchment in his arms, and tossed it in a heap on the fire. Part of it opened as it fell, and Micah saw for a few moments before the flames reached them, words which he never forgot till his dying day: "Princes have persecuted me without a cause, yet do I not swerve from Thy commandments." As he stood and looked, with a rage in his heart which he could not express, two more soldiers came out of the house, holding between them the scribe himself, a venerable man, in whom Micah recognized an old friend of his father's. They threw him down, face foremost, on

the fire, and held him there till he was suffocated. But before the tragedy was finished, the young Jew had turned away, feeling in his heart that the question which he had been debating so long was being rapidly settled for him.

The blow that was to clinch his conclusions was not long in falling. As he came near the bottom of the little hill on the top of which stood his sister's house, he saw a cross, and, bound to it by cords, what seemed to be the figure of a woman, with a dead child hung round her neck. The sun had set, and the light was failing with the rapidity that is characteristic of a southern latitude.

“Truly these Greeks have a strange way of showing their love of beauty. We have had sickening sights in Jerusalem of late enough to make their name stink in our nostrils for ever. What poor wretch is this? How has she offended our masters? And the child—what treason can he have been guilty of?”

And as he spoke a dreadful fear shot through his heart. After all—for he knew what a dauntless spirit his sister had shown at their last meeting—after all they might have circumcised the child and brought down upon themselves the vengeance of the persecutors. He turned aside from the road and ran up to the terrible object. It was almost dark by the time he reached it, and he had to light a torch which he carried with him in case of need, before he could

see what the object really was. Then one glance was enough. The features of the woman were black and swollen ; but he recognized them in a moment. It was the face of Hannah, his sister. But a month before he had seen it beaming with light and love, and now—— Had he needed any confirmation he would have found it in the child. The features were beyond recognition ; but the golden halo of hair was there ; its brightness scarcely dimmed.

He sank upon his knees, and lifting his hands to heaven he cursed the authors of this wickedness, and swore that he would give all his life to avenge the innocent blood. Then rising he hastened to the house of Azariah.

He found a considerable company assembled. They were deep in debate about the course of action to be pursued when Micah, who had been met by Azariah at the door, was introduced into the room. Most of those present were acquainted with him, at least by reputation, and they were naturally disposed to consider his presence an intrusion. But it was soon manifest that the new comer was not indifferent, much less hostile, to their objects.

“ Hear me, brethren,” he cried, “ if, indeed, one so unworthy as I may call you brethren,” and he went on to recount the struggles with which his mind had been agitated during the weeks just past. Then, after briefly touching on what he had just seen, he went on, “ I have sinned ; I have forsaken the Law



The Persecution.

of my God ; I have defiled myself by a companionship with the heathen ; and though I have not worshipped their false gods ”—there was a sigh of relief from the company as he uttered these words with a solemn emphasis—“ yet I have been a guest at the feasts of their temples. If, therefore, you judge me to have transgressed beyond all pardon, cast me out from your company ; I can find some other way to do service for the country that I have betrayed, and the God whom I have denied. Yet, if you think me worthy of death, I do not refuse to die.” And he drew a dagger from his belt, and offering it to one who seemed to be a leader in the assembly, stood with bared breast before him.

A murmur of admiration ran through the meeting.

“ Nay, brother,” said the man whom he addressed, “ this is not the time to take one soldier from the hosts of the Lord. You have sinned in the past ; make amends in the future. There will be time and opportunity enough. And if you are the brother of her who has witnessed a good confession even unto death, you will not fail to use the occasion that shall come.”

The company then resumed the debate which had been interrupted by Micah’s arrival. Little difference of opinion indeed remained among them, and when the president, Seraiah by name, brother-in-law of Azariah, as being the husband of his sister Ruth, stated his views they met with general assent.

“We have seen enough,” he said, “and suffered enough. This city is polluted, and is no longer a fit abode for the faithful. Let them that are in Judæa flee unto the mountains. Meanwhile we will gather together such as have not bowed the knee to Baal, and will make head against the oppressor. But here we shall be struck down, and perish as a beast perishes in the pit into which he has fallen.”

After this the company dispersed to make such preparation as they could for their departure, which was fixed for the night following. Micah and Seraiah remained behind in the house of mourning. Azariah withdrew to comfort his little girls, who were crying almost incessantly for their mother. Comfort he needed sorely for himself, and he found it, as far as it could be found, in this fatherly care. Every look and gesture of the little ones reminded him of her whom he had lost, and seemed to open the wound afresh. Yet it consoled him to talk to them about their mother, to tell the story of her early days, to remind them, though they did not need to be reminded, of all her goodness and love, and to picture her happiness where she sat in Paradise with the holy women of old, with Miriam, and Sarah, and Rachel.

Meanwhile Seraiah told the story of Hannah’s end to Micah. “We came together,” he said, “on the eighth day after the birth of her child; but though all was prepared for the circumcision of the boy,

we had not yet resolved what was to be done. I know that I wavered — I confess it with shame—and so did Azariah. And, indeed, I can scarcely find it in my heart to blame him. He had no thought of his own life, but to risk his wife's and the child's—that was terrible. And there were others who advised him to yield for the time ; the risk was too terrible. Indeed, that was the feeling of most of us, and those who thought otherwise were unwilling to speak. We were assembled, you know, in your sister's chamber. She sat on the bed, holding the little one in her arms. Her face was somewhat pale ; but she had a calm and steadfast look, like the look of one who watches his adversary in the battle line of the enemy, and there was a fire in her eyes, such as I have never seen in the eye of woman before. When I had spoken, counselling delay and yielding for a while to the necessities of the time, I turned to her and said, ‘ And you, Hannah, what think you ? ’

“ Then she spoke, and her voice never faltered for a moment, but was clear and full, though indeed she never raised it above the pitch that becomes the obedience and modesty of the woman. ‘ Pardon me,’ she said, ‘ fathers and brethren, if I seem, in differing from your counsel, to reproach you. I am but a weak woman, and know nothing of policy or of the needs of the time. But I know the thing that the Lord our God has commanded : ‘ Every man-child among you shall be circumcised,’ and

“whosoever shall not be circumcised that soul shall be cut off from among his people.” The Lord hath given me this child, and shall I not do for him according to the commandment? Shall we fear man rather than God? And for myself, is it a new thing for a mother to give her life into the hand of God? Four times already have I so given it, and He has restored it to me. And if it be His will that it be taken, shall I not obey? What said the Holy Children when Nebuchadnezzar would have had them fall down and worship the golden image, lest they should be cast into the burning fiery furnace. “Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us out of thy hand, and He will deliver us out of thy hand, O King; but if not——”

“Then she turned to her husband, and said, ‘What shall be his name?’ as steadily and quietly as if there had been no question of danger or fear. ‘Let his name be David,’ said the father, as he took the babe from its mother’s arms; for the sun was about to set, and in a few moments the due time would be past. So they carried the child into the next room. And when your sister heard his cry, she broke forth into blessings and thanksgiving. ‘Thanks be to Thee, O Lord,’ she cried, ‘in that Thou hast made him a child of the Covenant. And now I beseech Thee to grant that he may walk before Thee all the days of his life as walked Thy servant David, and that he may sit down with

Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.'

"After that she bade us stay and partake of the feast which she had caused to be prepared. Verily she had left nothing uncared for. Never was her table better spread, and, as you know, she was a notable housekeeper. And though, for her weakness, she could not sit at table with us, she was gay and cheerful even beyond her wont, so that we men, for very shame, had to banish the care from our faces, and laugh and be merry with her. But the next day the soldiers came and beat Azariah, as they thought, to death, and——" The speaker paused: indeed he could not speak for the choking tears. At last he said, in a broken voice, "What need to tell the rest? You know it."

The next night Azariah, Seraiah, Micah, and a company of some thirty men and women left Jerusalem. Part of them were on foot, but an ass had been found to carry Ruth, Seraiah's wife, who was expecting shortly to become a mother. Their destination was the hill-country that went by the name of the Wilderness of Bethaven.

CHAPTER X.

IN THE MOUNTAINS.

THE time is evening; the place is a rocky pass between Bethel and Michmash. At the mouth of a cave which commands a view of the approach from the westward, are seated two men, in one of whom we may recognize Shallum, the quondam wine-seller of Jerusalem.

“Well, comrade,” he is saying to his companion, “this business is not quite to my liking. It is all very well when we can relieve a Greek merchant, or, better still, a Syrian tax-gatherer, of his money-bags; but I hate robbing our own people. That poor fellow to-day, for instance, who was taking home his wages—he had been wood-cutting, he said, in Bashan—it really went to my heart to take the money from him.”

The companion whom he addressed was a rough, savage-looking fellow, who certainly did not look as if he would feel very much for Shallum’s scruples.

He had followed, indeed, the robber's trade, it may be said, from his childhood, as his fathers had followed it before him, almost since the days of the Captivity.

He now broke out into a loud, mocking laugh.

"Ah! my friend Shallum," he said, "you are a great deal too soft and tender-hearted. But then you are new to the business; when you have been at it as long as I have, you won't have these scruples. Now, mark what I say; and if we are to be good friends, don't let me hear any more of this nonsense. You are a stout fellow and a man of your hands; and as for myself, well, I rather think that a novice like you could hardly have come across a better teacher. I don't doubt that we shall do very well together; and when we have made a little money, I shan't blame you if you give up the business and become what they call an honest man. For myself, the 'honest man' line does not suit me—it is not in my blood, you know. But, meanwhile, if we are to work together, we must agree. Now, all is fish that comes to our net. Of course, I don't mean the people about here—our neighbours, you know. We must not touch them; on the contrary, they must have a share of what we make. As long as they are our friends we are safe. But all strangers are lawful booty. And mind—for I see that you are a little wroth about this—mind, it is only dead men who tell no tales."

Benjamin's words of wisdom—the more experienced of the two robbers was named Benjamin—were interrupted by an exclamation from his companion.

"Hush!" he cried, "I hear a sound of voices from the pass."

The two men listened; Shallum was evidently right. A party of travellers were approaching from the west.

"We are in luck," said Benjamin; "it is not often that we do business so late in the day."

As he spoke the leaders of the party emerged into sight.

"Shoot, Shallum!" said Benjamin; "strike one of those fellows down and we shall have the whole party in confusion."

"Nay, Benjamin; I hear the voices of women and children; and see—God wither my hand if I shoot at such helpless people as these."

The rest of the party was now in sight. Two men, one on either side of the ass, were supporting Ruth, who, worn out by the fatigues of the day, could with difficulty keep her seat on the animal. These were her husband and Azariah. Close behind came Micah, carrying on his shoulder the little Judith, who was fast asleep. Then followed Miriam, Judith's elder sister. The poor child limped sadly along, for her city life had been but a poor training for that long day's march, and she felt just

a little envious of the good fortune which Judith enjoyed in being carried.

Shallum recognized the figures of Seraiah and Ruth, with whom he happened to have had some slight acquaintance in Jerusalem, and from whom indeed he had received no little kindness.

“ Benjamin,” he said, in a determined voice, “ I know these people, and if I can help it they shall suffer no harm.”

“ Well, well; have your way,” said his companion, who indeed was not quite as hard of heart as he would make himself out. “ If, as you say, you know them, go down and make friends.”

Shallum at once made his way down into the pass, and, standing in the path, greeted the travellers with the customary salutation, “ Peace be with you ! ”

“ What, Shallum ! ” said Seraiah, “ is that you ? What brings you here ? ”

“ That were a long story,” returned the man, “ and this is not the time to tell it. But can I serve you ? ”

“ Can you find shelter for my poor wife ? But it is idle, I fear, to ask you. There can be no inn near this wild place.”

“ ’Tis true, sir, there is no inn; yet if you can put up with such poor lodging as we can give, the lady will have at least shelter.”

Ruth was lifted from her seat on the ass, and carried between her husband and Azariah up the

rocky track that led to the cave, Shallum showing the way with a lighted torch in his hand, for by this time the night had fallen.

Benjamin met the little party at the mouth of the cave. His life of crime had not quenched all kindly feeling in him. He felt, too, that he was a host; and the sense of hospitality, which keeps its hold on an Eastern heart as long as anything good is left to it, bade him do his best for his guests. And the sweet smile of thanks with which Ruth greeted him when she was laid on the couch of cloaks, which the two inmates of the cave had hastily arranged on a pile of heather, won him altogether.

A minute or two afterwards Micah followed with the two children; Judith, still fast asleep, was put down by Ruth's side, while Miriam forgot her fatigue in the delightful excitement of this new adventure. The new-comers had brought with them a slender store of provisions. These they proceeded to share, declining with thanks the dried flesh and wine which their entertainers offered. The rest of the party found shelter, under guidance of the robbers, in some of the many caves with which the rocks in the neighbourhood were honeycombed.

Next morning the arrangements for housing the little colony were made. There was an abundance of caves to give shelter to all, and the accommodation though rough, at least protected them from the

weather. Their life was simple in the extreme—simple even to hardness. They sought for herbs and roots, and from the neighbouring peasants they bought a few goats, to browse among the rocks, and a small quantity of corn, which they bruised between stones and baked. The mountain springs furnished their drink, a few flasks of wine being reserved for any cases of sickness. Twice a day the whole company met for worship. Seraiah read a portion first from the Law and then from the Prophets, for they had not forgotten to bring rolls of the Sacred Books. Then standing erect, with covered heads, their faces turned towards the Temple, they joined in prayer. In the words of one who himself in old time had found himself shut out for a while from the privileges of the Holy Place and was content to realize them by faith, the congregation uttered together the petition, “Let my prayer be set forth in Thy sight as the incense; and let the lifting up of my hands be an evening sacrifice.” One of the psalms of penitence followed; for surely they had all many sins to repent of—sins of which they were now suffering the penalty; and, after the psalm, a prayer for deliverance from the enemy, and for the setting up again of the throne of David, and for that without which neither deliverance nor a restored kingdom could profit them—purity and righteousness in their own hearts and souls.

Nothing could be more simple and frugal than

their daily fare. Wild fruits and herbs were largely used, and any little plots of fertile ground that could be found were planted with vegetables, some far-seeing member of the party having brought with him a small supply of garden seeds. When a few days after their arrival Ruth gave birth to a son it was much feared that the scanty supply of nourishing food might long delay her restoration to strength. This fear was not realized. The feeling of freedom and deliverance combined with the fine mountain air to bring her back to her wonted health, and she found herself able to go about her daily work long before she could have hoped to do so in the more enervating atmosphere of the city.

One day she had gone to gather herbs for the daily mess, a work in which she was especially useful from the knowledge of plants which she had taken pains to acquire in her unmarried days. She had taken, of course, the new-born infant with her, and Miriam, who was delighted to perform, as far as her strength permitted, the office of nurse. The little Judith, whose night's rest had been disturbed by some childish ailment, had been left at home to make up her allowance of sleep. The mother found on her return that a strange visitor had made herself at home in the cave. The little one was fast asleep on a bed of rugs which had been made up for her, and curled up at her side with one of her fore paws

round her neck was a jackal. The two companions were roused together by the arrival of the party, and, wonderful to relate, neither showed any symptoms of alarm. The jackal rose from its resting-place, approached Ruth, and fawned at her feet, and the child came after its bedfellow and stroked affectionately its shaggy skin.

When, two or three weeks afterwards, the new comer gave birth to a litter of cubs, the joy of the children was complete. The little animals soon learnt to play with the girls, and their dam sat by and watched their gambols, and sometimes even condescended to join in them herself.

The little colony heard of the strange incident with delight, and saw in it a token of Divine favour. "Man rages cruelly against us," they said, "but we find friends among the beasts of the field. Surely it is our God who hath changed the heart of this savage dweller in the wilderness, and we will trust that He will do yet greater things than these."

"Mother," said Miriam one day to Ruth, "by what name shall we call our new friend?"

The question puzzled her, and she referred it to her husband.

"It does not seem fitting," she said, "that we should give the name of a daughter of the Covenant to the beast, for though she is of kindly temper yet she is unclean."

Seraiah thought awhile.

“ You say truth, my wife. Let us call her Jael.”

“ But why Jael ? ”

“ Because the wife of Heber was of the unclean, for was she not of the house of the Kenite ? Yet was she a friend of Israel, for she slew Sisera that was captain of the host of Jabin, King of Canaan.”

So thenceforward the creature went by the name of Jael.

It was not long before she justified her name by showing that she could be fierce on occasion.

A wayfarer, who described himself as a discharged soldier and a Moabite by birth, asked for shelter and food. Scanty as were the means of the fugitives, they did not grudge the stranger a share of their meal. They gave him their best, adding to their daily fare the special luxury of some dried grapes. As he complained of being footsore, Ruth applied some simple remedies to the blisters on his feet. Altogether he was treated not only as a welcome but even as an honoured guest: On his part he professed a fervent sympathy with the hopes and plans of his hosts. The next morning he started as if to continue his journey. But the cupidity of the wretch had been roused by the sight of the handsome earrings—almost the sole remaining relic of former affluence—which he had spied in his hostess’s ears. About an hour before noon, when he judged that the men would be still busy about their daily work, he crept back to the cave. Ruth was sitting

by a fire nursing her babe. The jackal lay asleep in a corner; the girls were playing with the cubs on a sunny little plot of ground outside.

“Lady,” began the fellow, in a beggar’s wheedling voice, “can you spare a little money for a poor fellow who has not so much as a copper coin to buy him a piece of bread?”

Ruth was startled at his re-appearance, but concealed her alarm.

“Friend,” she said, “I have no money; but I will give you half a loaf if you want food, though you had done better, I should think, to keep on your way, for you can hardly find any that are poorer than we.”

“But you have gold,” said the man.

“Gold? Not I,” she answered.

“Nay, lady,” he went on, with a perceptible tone of threatening in his voice, “those earrings that you wear are doubtless of true metal. They add, indeed, to your beauty, and it is a pity that you should lose them; but then there is no one to admire you in this wilderness, and they would keep a poor fellow like myself in flesh and wine for a month or more.”

“My earrings?”, said Ruth, stupefied by the man’s audacity.

“Yes, your earrings, lady,” said the man. “I should advise you to take them out yourself, for if I have to do it I am afraid that I shall show myself a very rough tirewoman.”

The spirit of Ruth, the same that had dwelt of old

in a Miriam or a Deborah, was roused at the man's insolent audacity. She seized a half-burnt brand from the fire and stood on her defence. The soldier, thinking that he had found an easy prey, approached. But he had not reckoned on an ally who was ready to help her in her need. Jael had been woken by the voices, and watched with glaring eyes the soldier's movements, uttering every now and then a low growl, which, however, the man was too much occupied to heed. As soon as he came within reach, she sprang upon him from her lurking-place. The force with which she threw herself upon him overset him, and he fell backwards, his head striking on the mill-stone which formed part of the scanty furniture of the cave. In a moment her fangs were in his throat. In vain did Ruth, who saw the man's danger and was unwilling that he should perish in his sins, call her by her name. All the savage instinct in her was roused by the taste of blood. Before two minutes had passed the freebooter was dead.

“We did well to call her Jael,” said Seraiah that evening, as he helped to carry the corpse out of the cave. “The wretch has received the due reward of his deeds.”

CHAPTER XI.

NEWS BAD AND GOOD.

As the weeks went by fugitives continued to arrive at the little asylum which Seraiah and Azariah had founded among the hills. There was not one of them but brought with him some dismal story of the cruelty of the heathen and the renegades who acted as their instruments, and of the sufferings of the faithful. We should weary our readers were we to relate them in their monotony of horror. One will suffice, for it is the most famous as it is the most tragic of all the tales of that reign of terror.

One night the sentinels, whom the chiefs of the little colony were always careful to post, heard the sound of approaching footsteps. They challenged the new comer, and bade him stand, and tell them his errand. He could not articulate his answer, so spent was he with fatigue and distress; but it was evident that he was harmless, a mere youth, solitary, and unarmed. Unwilling to disturb the little colony at so late an hour—it was indeed

past midnight—the sentinels bade the stranger rest before their watch-fire. He was so exhausted and weary that he could swallow but very little of the food which his entertainers offered him. A few mouthfuls of barley cake, and a draught of milk more than satisfied him. Then he sank down on the ground overpowered with sleep, and his hosts wrapped him in a cloak and left him to his repose. Yet, wearied as he was, his slumbers were broken. Again and again he started up with a cry of horror on his lips. Those who listened to him felt sure that he must be going over in his dreams some dreadful scenes which he had witnessed.

The next day he could scarcely be recalled to consciousness. Indeed it was judged well to leave nature to recover herself. The women of the colony took it in turns to watch by his side, and were ready, when he awoke for a few moments, with a cup of milk, the only thing which he seemed to relish. By degrees his slumbers grew more peaceful, and on the morning of the second day after his arrival he woke calm and collected.

It was Ruth who then happened to be on duty at his side. When he saw her, he said, “Lady, I have a story to tell, and the chief of this place should hear it. Let him make haste to come, for I feel that I cannot rest while it is untold.”

Ruth sent one of her children to fetch her husband. The stranger refused to postpone his narrative till

he should have gathered a little more strength. “Nay,” said he; “it is like a weight upon my soul, and I would lighten me of it by committing it to faithful ears.”

“Speak on,” said Seraiah.

Then the lad told his story.

“My name is Abimelech, and I come from Jerusalem. My father and mother are dead; but I lived with my grandmother, the mother of my father, and his brethren, my uncles. There were seven of them, the eldest being some thirty-and-three years of age, and the youngest twenty; but my father that is dead was the first-born. On the first day of the month, coming home about the eleventh hour from the school of the Rabbi Zechariah——”

“Are there then yet those who teach in the city?” interrupted Seraiah.

“Yes,” answered the lad, “but they do it by stealth, for the reading of the Law is strictly forbidden by the Governor. But we learn it notwithstanding, and verily if the heathen should destroy every roll that there is of the Holy Books in the whole world there are those who could replace them from memory. I pretend not to so much; but I could say three out of the five books of Moses, the man of God.”

“Praised be the Lord God of Israel,” cried Seraiah, “who hath not left Himself without a witness! But go on with your story.”

“Coming home, then, from school I found the soldiers of Philip the Phrygian in the house, Philip himself being there. They had set forth a table in the court of the house, whereon they had placed abominable flesh. My uncles were standing bound, guarded by soldiers, and with them was my grandmother. Then said the Governor, Philip, to the eldest of the seven, whose name was Judah, ‘Pleasure me, my friend, by eating this excellent meat; ‘tis of the most savoury, believe me.’ My uncle Judah answered, ‘I cannot obey thee in this matter, for it is forbidden by the Law.’ Philip said, ‘Maybe he lacks an appetite. Give him that which shall sharpen his taste.’ Thereupon the executioner stepped forth with his lash, and gave him ten stripes. ‘Dost feel hungry now?’ said the Governor. ‘I had sooner starve,’ said Judah, ‘than eat the abominable thing.’ ‘Nay,’ cried the Governor, ‘miscall not the good things which are provided for you at the charge of thy lord the King.’ Then he said to the executioner, ‘This fellow uses not his tongue for any good purpose, but only to rail against my lord. Cut it out, therefore.’ So they cut the tongue out of my uncle’s mouth; and after that they cut off his hands and his feet. And afterwards, he being yet alive, they put him in a pan and burnt him over the fire. Then the Governor said to the second in age, whose name was Eleazar, ‘Ah! friend, like you this better than the swine’s flesh? You may have your

choice, if you will.' But he answered nothing. Then they tortured him most cruelly till he died. And so they did to all, one after the other. What they did I cannot bear to tell; nor, indeed, do I know the whole truth, for when three had perished in this manner I fainted for the horror of the thing; nor did I come to myself till the sixth was ready to suffer. Him I heard say these words to the Governor—'Be not deceived, or think that our God has abandoned us. He has given us over to your hand because we have offended against Him; nor do we suffer beyond what we have deserved. But as we have not escaped the punishment of our sins, so neither will you, but will perish miserably!' After this he did not speak another word; nay, nor give a sign of pain, but stood steadfast and unmoved.

"When there was but one of the seven left alive, Benjamin by name, the Governor seeing him, and, I take it, having some pity on his youth, for he was fair as a woman, said to him, 'Young man, you see how all these have perished miserably, because of their pride and obstinacy. Learn, then, by their fate to behave yourself more wisely. And hark! I will give you riches, more than you can desire, and promote you to honour, if you will humour my lord the King in this small matter.' Benjamin said, 'Your gifts, my lord, be to another, and your honours to such as are worthy of them; but as for me, I will

not depart from the law of my God.' Then Philip said to the mother of the seven, 'Persuade him, for I would not have you left childless, if there is any help. These your sons were stout fellows, and could have done good service for my lord if they had been better advised; and I would fain save this one that is left. Reason with him, then, that he save his life, and that you be not wholly bereaved.' Then the woman said, 'Trust me, my lord; I will reason with him.' Then Philip smiled and said, 'Your wisdom comes somewhat late'; and he whispered to one that stood by, 'You see that I have prevailed at last.' But the man shook his head. Then the woman said to her son, 'O, my child, have pity on me, for I bore for you the pangs of childbirth, and spent on you the labour of nurture, bringing you up to this age. Repay me, therefore, for all that I have done.' Then she paused awhile, and those that stood by scarcely knew what was in her heart. But the young man said, 'Mother, how shall I repay you?' And she answered, 'By remembering that the Lord made heaven and earth, and all that is therein. Depart not from His Law, nor forget Him. Heed not this tormentor, who has power over your body for a short moment; but stand steadfast, as your brethren have stood steadfast; so shall I receive you with them into the everlasting glory.' Then the young man smiled, as a bridegroom might smile when the veil is lifted from the face of his

bride, and said, ‘Fear not, my mother; so it shall be, the Lord helping me.’ As for the Governor, he was mad with rage, and cried to the executioner, ‘Smite him, and this fool also.’ And the man, who indeed, I take it, was weary of his work, smote the youth and mother, and killed them, dealing each but one blow. So they escaped the torture.”

On the following Sabbath Seraiah read to the congregation the story of the Three Children in the fire, and then delivered a stirring address on the faith and courage of the heroic mother and her sons. The people listened with a breathless attention, and when he had finished, drew, so to speak, together that deep sigh of relief which tells the speaker that he has been holding the hearts of his hearers. He was one of those trustful souls who amidst all dangers find their strength in quietness and confidence. But the other leaders of the settlement could not help feeling somewhat anxious as to the future. What was to be the end? This constancy under suffering was grand beyond all praise; but were they and their brethren to stand still and see the religion of their fathers trampled out in blood? Was there no one to strike a blow for their faith and their fatherland? For they could measure the average strength and depth of human nature, and knew that there are ten who are ready to do and dare for one who can suffer and be strong. “Do you remember,” said Seraiah to his brother-in-law, as they were

talking over the position of affairs after the gathering for worship—"do you remember that day when we fought against the Edomites, how our line crumbled away while we had to stand still as a target for the Edomite arrows, and how it grew solid again in a moment when our general gave the signal to charge? One was ready before to think that half the men were cowards, and then one could almost have sworn that there was not a coward among them. Yes, Azariah, we must strike when the time comes; but when the time will come is more than I can tell."

The next day brought an answer to his question.

The people were dispersing after the usual morning prayer when a stranger was seen hurrying up the pass. Arrived at the top, where a party of the men had gone to meet him, he threw himself breathless on the ground; at the same time he drew a small piece of folded parchment from the pouch which was fastened to his girdle, and handed it to one of the men. It ran thus: "Mattathias to Seraiah, in the wilderness of Bethaven, greeting. Listen to the young man who brings this present without doubting, for he is faithful, and speaks words of truth." In a few moments Seraiah appeared. By this time the messenger had recovered his breath, and was ready to tell his tale.

"What news bring you?" said Seraiah.

"Great news; for the Lord has smitten His

enemies hip and thigh by the hand of Mattathias, son of Asmon, and by the hand of his sons."

A murmur of delight ran through the little audience, and every eye brightened at the prospect of action.

"Tell on. We hear!" cried Seraiah.

"May I crave a drink of water? for the way is long, and I have been travelling since the sun set yesterday."

The water was fetched. When he had quenched his thirst, young Asaph—that was the messenger's name—began his story.

"You know Mattathias, the son of Asmon, and the five young men, his sons, how they dwelt at Modin? Two months since, Philip the Phrygian—may the Lord cut him off in his sins!" and the speaker paused, and spat upon the ground to emphasize his disgust. "This Phrygian, then, sent one of his officers two months since to build an altar to one of the false gods before whom these children of perdition bow down. So the altar was built, none hindering, for the people were without a leader. This being finished, the Governor's officer proclaimed a sacrifice and a feast to one of the demons whom these heathen worship. I know not the evil thing's name, and if I knew it, would not take the accursed word upon my lips. On the appointed day there was a great gathering of the inhabitants of Modin. It was about the tenth hour

when the Governor's deputy came, with his trumpeters and a small company of soldiers—it may be a score. When he had taken his seat the ministers brought up the ox that was for the sacrifice, a great beast, altogether white; and they had gilded his horns and put garlands of flowers about his neck, as their custom is. Then the deputy called to one Menahem, a usurer that dwelt in the village, and one of those who would sell their souls for a shekel. 'Menon,' he said—for they had changed his name after their fashion to one of their own tongue—'Menon, come forth, and do your office.' And then he turned to the people, and said, 'Hearken to me, ye Jews. This Menon here, who is known to all of us, has been promoted to great honour, for my lord Philip, who is the lieutenant of the Divine Antiochus, has made him priest. Honour him henceforth accordingly. And be sure also that if you are obedient, and give up your own dull and senseless superstition, and worship henceforth as the King commands, it shall be well with you and your children.' When he had ended, the fellow approached the altar, and cut some hairs from the forehead of the beast, and sprinkled some meal mingled with salt between its horns. And it chanced, or, I should rather say, it was ordered of the Lord, that as the man did this Mattathias and his sons passed by on the outskirts of the crowd. And when he perceived the abominable thing that was being done, and that he who

did it was a Jew, his spirit was moved within him. Then he ran forward, he and his sons with him. And when they were come into the space before the altar the old man cried, 'He that is on the Lord's side come hither!' And some threescore of the people that were there came to him, and the rest stood still, and did nothing, for they knew that the sons of Asmon were mighty men of valour. As for the deputy and his soldiers, they were astonished beyond measure, and before they came to themselves some of the company of Mattathias rushed upon them and disarmed them. But Mattathias himself, with Judas his son, laid hold on Menahem. Then that miserable creature fell on his knees and begged for pardon, saying that he had done this thing on compulsion. 'Nay,' said Mattathias, 'the compulsion was of thy own evil and greedy heart. Thou hast sinned beyond all mercy of man; but the mercies of the Lord are past all measure. Die thou must; but I would have thee die in the faith of a son of Israel.' Then the poor wretch—I had never thought to pity him, for he turned my own mother, when she lay dying, on to the public road, but no one could have refused him pity then—the wretch, I say, repeated with a stammering tongue, 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one Lord.' And now he said, 'I give thee for thy prayers to the All-Merciful, till the shadow of this staff come so far,' and he planted a staff in the ground. And

when the time was spent, the old man took his sword, and sheared off the wretch's head with one blow. I had not thought that there was such strength in his arm. Then they brought the deputy and his soldiers to Mattathias. First he dealt with the deputy. 'Slay him,' he said, 'for he has made the people of the Lord to transgress.' So they slew him. Then they made the soldiers stand before him. Four out of their number were Jews. These he commanded to be slain, after giving them the same grace that he had given to Menahem. To the others he said, 'You have not sinned as these your fellows, for you were born in darkness. Take, therefore, your choice: depart, and take good heed not to fall into our hands again, for, if you so fall, you die without further mercy; or, if ye will, stay with us. Only you must follow our ways, so far as it is commanded that the stranger should follow them.' Half chose to depart, and half to stay.

"After this, Mattathias chose some of the young men to go as messengers to the villages round about, and carry the tidings of what had been done, and to say, 'The Lord hath lifted up His ensign; gather yourselves together unto it.' Also he appointed a place where they should meet—that is to say, Michmash."

"And when may we look for his coming?" asked Seraiah.

“Doubtless he will come to-morrow.”

That night there was much rejoicing in the little colony. No one, indeed, deceived himself with the thought that he could look forward to easy and pleasant days. All knew perfectly well that a time of struggle and suffering was before them. But there was hope. The darkness had parted, and they saw a far-off gleam of light. At the least they would have the chance of striking a blow for their country and their God.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PATRIOT ARMY.

THREE days passed before Mattathias and his sons arrived; but when they came, they brought with them a considerable force. The news of the events at Modin had spread like wildfire through southern Judæa, and hundreds who had endured the rule of the heathen with ill-concealed impatience flocked to the standard of revolt. It was a strange array that might have been seen making its way up the mountain pass. A professional soldier would certainly at the first glance have thought meanly of its fighting capacities. Scarcely a score of the whole multitude was properly armed. Old weapons that had hung unused for a century or more had been taken down that they might strike another blow for the God of Israel. There had not been time to rub the rust from the sword-blades and the spear-heads, much less to hammer out upon the anvil the dents and notches left by the half-forgotten battles in which they had

last been used. But it was only a few who had even these antiquated weapons. Most of the fighting men were armed as their fathers had been under the domination of the Canaanites in the days of Barak, or of the Philistines in the days of Saul. They carried mattocks and hoes, pruning-hooks and reaping-hooks tied to the ends of poles, or stakes shod with iron or even only hardened in the fire. But a nearer inspection would have changed the contempt of the military critic into something like admiration. These men had all that goes to the making of the soldier except the arms, and this want, after all, is the easiest to be supplied. They had on their faces the set, stern look of those who are fighting for a cause, and that a cause very near to their hearts. There were old men among them; but most were in the full vigour of youth and manhood. A real leader of men would have preferred to be followed by them than by the most handsomely equipped army of mercenaries.

At the head of the column walked the aged Mattathias. Two of his sons, John and Judas, were with him, the other two being busy with the multifarious duties which fell upon the leaders of a force as yet so imperfectly organized. The old man—he had passed the threescore years and ten which are more commonly the limit of human existence among the short-lived races of the East than among ourselves—had been carried in a litter for part of the

way. This he had left at the entrance of the pass, being anxious not to give an impression of weakness. He now walked erect and with a firm step, his indomitable spirit supplying for the time all that was wanting in his physical strength. Nothing could be more enthusiastic than the reception which met him when he reached the little colony among the hills. He was the champion for whom they had been looking, and they received him as if he had been an “angel of God.” Azariah and Seraiah, who had been hitherto informal leaders, gladly resigned their power into his hands, and from thenceforwards acted under his orders.

There was indeed much to do. The little post in the mountains was now to become a fortress, garrisoned by an army which was already considerable in numbers, and which daily increased in strength. Faithful Jews from all parts of the country flocked to the place which seemed the last refuge of patriotism and faith. Nor were there wanting less respectable adherents. There was not a few men who, like Benjamin and Shallum, had followed a life in which right and wrong, good motives and bad, were curiously mixed up and confounded. They were divided between patriotism and robbery—divided, of course, in very varying proportions. None were quite blameless, and none were quite bad. The most unprincipled had lurking somewhere in his heart a real regard for his country, and, to say the

least, he found much more satisfaction in emptying the pockets of a heathen than in robbing his own people. The most honest, on the other hand, could not always guide his actions by any strict rule of integrity. He had to live, and if his enemies did not furnish him with the means, he must get them from his friends. Many of these men were genuinely attracted by the new movement, genuinely glad to lead a life which their consciences could heartily approve. Others found that their occupation was gone, and that they must enlist in the new patriot army or starve. The garrison thus gained a considerable number of recruits, but some of them were of a class that was likely to give no little trouble in the future.

In strong contrast with these doubtful adherents, and yet, in some respects, even more difficult to control, were the Chasidim—the “religious,” “mighty men and voluntarily devoted to the Law”—the spiritual ancestors of the Pharisees of a later time, but actuated by a zeal far more sincere than what could commonly be found in their degenerate descendants. Men braver it would not have been possible to find; their courage amounted to something like recklessness; but they were enthusiasts, and held their tenets with a tenacity that sometimes made discipline almost impossible.

An incident that occurred soon after the arrival of Mattathias and his sons exhibited these difficulties in

a striking way. The scene of it was the extreme right of the position, where Abiathar, one of the Chasidim, an able soldier but a most uncompromising zealot, was in chief command. The whole of the population had assembled to take part in a Sabbath service. They had listened to the great chapter in Deuteronomy which proclaims the blessings that will follow obedience, the curses that will fall on those who disobey. They had sung together that Psalm "for the Sons of Korah," which tells of triumph and of shame, in which Israel now thanks Him who has saved them from their enemies and now complains that He has made them a reproach to their neighbours' scorn, and a derision to them that are round about. And they were listening to a stirring exhortation to quit them like men and be strong, from the soldier-priest who was in chief command, when an alarm was raised that the enemy were at hand. Some of the younger men were on the point of running to fetch their weapons, for they were of course unarmed, when the stern voice of their leader called them back. "Have you so soon forgotten the blessing and the curse which the Lord your God hath set before you? Has He not commanded you to keep holy the Sabbath-day, and will you profane it by smiting with the sword?" They obeyed the command, though not without some murmurs from those who had not been thoroughly schooled in the stern tenets of the Chasidim. Meanwhile the enemy, a

strong force that had been sent out from the garrison at Jerusalem, had come up. A herald from the officer in command approached, and delivered a message in these terms:—

“ Philip the Governor, and Apollonius, captain of the King’s army, bid you come forth from your hiding-place and deliver yourselves up. Let your former transgressions against the King suffice, and do now according to his commandment. So will he have mercy upon you, and admit you to his grace.”

The answer of the Jewish commander was brief and decisive: “We will not come forth, neither will we do according to the King’s commandment.”

Then followed one of the strangest scenes recorded in history. The peremptory refusal of the proffered terms was followed in a few minutes by a shower of missiles from the hostile force. The crowd at which they were aimed made no attempt at resistance, or even at escape. They fell where they stood, without lifting a hand, almost without uttering a cry. There is no greater trial of an army’s discipline than to make it stand and see its ranks thinned without being able to strike a blow in return. But the soldiers who endure this trial endure it in the hope of an hour that cannot be long delayed, when they shall reap the reward of their patience in an assured victory. The Chasidim who followed Abiathar had no such support in their endurance. They stood like sheep for the slaughter, strong men

as they were, and conscious that they could save themselves if they would. Not a stone did they throw in reply to the missiles that were showered upon them; and when the hostile ranks closed in, not till after some wondering delay, and began to finish the bloody work with their swords, they still held their ground with the same passive, unresisting courage.

To one man at least the sword of the heathen brought that day a welcome release from his troubles. Shallum, the wine-seller of Jerusalem, had been consumed with remorse for the part which he had taken on the day when he followed "Bacchus and his reeling train." The words haunted his mind with maddening repetition. The stern doctrines of the Chasidim had exercised a singular attraction for him, and though, stained as he was with sins for which he could scarcely hope purification, he did not even propose to join their ranks, he was a diligent attendant at their services and an attentive listener to their teaching. This day he had stood on the outskirts of the crowd, hearing with a rapt attention the promises and denunciations of the Law, and listening to, though not daring to join in, the chanted psalms. "Perhaps," he said to himself, "the sound of the holy music will rid me of that accursed Bacchic chant which rings for ever in my ears." For a moment, when the massacre began, that love of life which even the most

miserable scarcely ever loses rose up strong in his heart. But he crushed it down. "I have transgressed too often," he thought to himself, "the commandment of the Lord; let me obey it at least this once, though I die." The next moment the stroke of a Greek sword levelled him to the ground, and the Bacchic chant vexed him no more.

Not a single man of all that company—so strong was the contagion of enthusiasm among them—made any effort to escape the fate that overtook his companions. Still there was left a survivor to carry to Mattathias the news, at once so terrible and so glorious, of that day's doings. One of the men had been felled to the ground by the blow of a stone at the first discharge of the enemy's missiles, and had been left for dead upon the field. When he came to himself, late in the night, he found himself the only living being among masses of the slain. His first duty was obviously to carry tidings of the events to the commander-in-chief, and he made his way to head-quarters as quickly as his enfeebled condition permitted.

Mattathias saw that this question of the Sabbath must be settled at once, and, if the war was to be carried on with any prospect of success, settled on the side of freedom. He called a council in the early morning of the next day—the news had reached him about two hours after midnight. His five sons were present, as were Azariah, and Seraiah, with

others who held command in the patriot army. A long debate followed, for some of the Chasidim still clung to their rigid opinions, even in the face of the disaster which had happened, and the manifest probability, even certainty, of its happening again. They answered with stern iteration to each appeal that was made to them by the advocates of reason and moderation, "Thou shalt keep holy the Sabbath-day." It was impossible to yield to them, and yet, such was their courage and devotion, almost equally impossible to break with them.

Mattathias, who presided at the assembly, had left the debate to other speakers, and had contented himself with keeping the peace between them, as far as he could. At last he rose and delivered his opinion.

"Brethren," he said, "let us take heed that we break not the Law while we seem to keep it. The Lord hath commanded us that we shall not work our own works or do our own pleasure upon His day. Shall we take occasion thereby to neglect His work and leave undone His pleasure? The heathen have come into His inheritance and devoured it. Shall we suffer them to usurp it for ever? Say, too, ye that will not stretch out a finger to save the people of the Lord from destruction because it is the Sabbath, do ye not reach out your hand to save a brother or a sister or a neighbour, yea, even a stranger upon that day, if it so chance that they be overtaken by some instant need? Nay, more; do ye not pull

out an ox or an ass, if it be fallen on that day into a pit ? and will ye not pull out the Lord's people from the pit which the malice of their enemies shall have digged for them ? Listen, therefore, to my sentence. If the enemy come upon us upon the Sabbath we will beat him back, God helping. Nevertheless, if it may be so without damage to the Lord's cause, we will not march against him on that day. If there be sin in this matter let it be upon me and my children."

And as he spoke the five young men, his sons, rose up in their places, and answered, *Amen.*

The decision was generally accepted and acted upon, though to the last some of the more determined of the Chasidim avoided, as far as was possible, all military action on the Sabbath.

The rule of Sabbath observance was, however, still very strictly kept. It was two or three days after the council described above had been held, when one of the half-bandit, half-patriot recruits was discovered busily employed in cleaning his armour on the Lord's day. He was kept in confinement till sunset, when the Sabbath was considered to end ; a council of war was hastily summoned to hear the case. The man pleaded the recent decision of Mattathias, which had, he said, relaxed the law of the Sabbath. It was answered to him that the cleaning of armour was no necessary work, and that the distinction must now be kept more strictly than

before, lest the people should fall into sin. He then urged that his offence was an error, and might be atoned for by a sin-offering.

“Alas! my son,” said Mattathias, “the Temple is profaned; nor can there be any more either sin-offering or peace-offering till it be purified. You must bear your iniquity yourself.”

John the soldier, who was unwilling that the army should lose one whose offence, after all, had only been an excess of military zeal, and Simon, whose gentle soul always was inclined to the milder course, voted for a lighter punishment than death, but they were overruled. Even Judas voted against them, knowing that such an army as theirs could only be held together by the bond of an enthusiastic faith.

“Give the glory to God,” said the aged president of the Court, when he had communicated his sentence to the prisoner, “and take your death patiently, knowing that though you be judged according to men in the flesh, you shall live according to God in the spirit.” The man bowed his head in submission, and repeated the confession of faith, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one Lord.”

“The Lord bless thee, my son,” said Mattathias, “and take thee into Abraham’s bosom.”

So the transgressor died. And they buried him under a heap of stones to which every passer-by made it his duty to add his tribute.

CHAPTER XIII.

GUERILLA WARFARE IN THE MOUNTAINS.

SOME weeks had necessarily to pass before the patriot army could assume the offensive. Some kind of drill was necessary, though Judas, who had the chief direction of military affairs, did not attempt to teach his men any elaborate manœuvres. But practice in sword-play and in shooting with the bow was diligently attended to. A corps of slingers was also formed under the command of one Sheba, a Benjamite, who possessed that skill with his weapon which was characteristic of his tribe. The sling was admirably suited to the kind of warfare which they would have to wage. As long as there were stones there would not be wanting missiles for the slings, while the supply of arrows would be likely to fall short, and could not easily be renewed. Meanwhile some rude anvils had been fitted up, and every one who could work as a smith was pressed into the service of repairing old arms or making new ones.

By degrees many of the fighting men obtained an equipment which, if not very handsome, was at least fairly effective. Some of the new arrivals, too, were old soldiers, and brought their arms with them. Jews who had enlisted in the armies of the various Asiatic kings flocked to the standard of independence, when once it had been set up. Even some of the well-paid mercenaries who formed the bodyguard of Antiochus were patriotic enough to prefer to their luxurious existence the privations of life among the mountains. It was a life which, at the least, they could lead without offence.

It was winter when Mattathias and his sons reached the mountains; and with the first beginnings of spring the force under his command, now increased to a respectable strength, commenced active operations. These were extended over a considerable range of country to all the villages that had submitted to the edicts of the heathen rulers of the land. Even fortified towns, in several instances, were surprised, not, it may be guessed, without the connivance of the patriotic party within the walls. The idol altars which the King's commissioners had set up were thrown down with every circumstance of indignity. All stores belonging to the usurping government were confiscated for the use of the national forces. But private property was respected. Arms, indeed, if they were likely to be useful, were taken, but always taken at a price.

Severe as was the discipline, it met with a cheerful submission from the men, so commanding was the influence exercised by their leaders. Conspicuous among them were, of course, the sons of Mattathias. All were favourites, but Judas and Simon took the lead. The strength, the skill, and the daring of the first were such that he was absolutely idolized by his troops. There was no task, however perilous, which they would not attempt under his guidance, for there was nothing which he did not seem capable of achieving. His physical strength was enormous; and his fertility of resource unfailing. He had always some new device for outwitting the enemy; and when the crisis of an undertaking arrived, if an attacking party were to be helped up some almost inaccessible height, a gate to be broken open by main force, or a pass to be held against overwhelming odds, Judas was always ready and always, it seemed, successful. Scarcely less honoured, though in a different way, was the prudence and kindness of Simon. If Judas never failed in an attempt it was, in part at least, because Simon's advice was so uniformly sagacious, because he could measure so exactly the means at their command. And when the fighting was over, no one could be more unwearying in his attentions to the wounded. The voice which rang so loud and clear through the din of battle was now soft and caressing, and the touch

of his hand was as gentle and tender as if it had been a woman's.

Such leaders could do anything with their troops, even when they had to task their obedience by the infliction of punishment. Even such men as the ex-robber Benjamin felt what may be called the infection of discipline. He had accompanied one of the expeditions, in which a select force of patriots, after marching forty miles within twenty-four hours, surprised a squadron of Greek cavalry in one of the towns of Galilee. A short but sharp conflict took place in the square of the town, and Benjamin had borne himself with conspicuous courage. The struggle over, the soldiers had received entertainment, not in every case very willingly given, from the inhabitants of the town. Benjamin happened to be quartered upon a particularly churlish host, and resenting the coarse and scanty fare, so unsuited to the wealth apparent in all the fittings of the house, had revenged himself by abstracting a rich cloak belonging to his miserly entertainer. The article was stowed away on his own person, but the keen eye of one of the Chasidim officers espied it; the thief was denounced when the force had reached the encampment, and brought before the council, which was held under the presidency of Judas. The culprit pleaded in vain the shabby treatment which he had received. It was not for him, he was told, to take the law into his own

hands. When he urged that the man was a traitor to his country he was asked whether he had himself taken the cloak from patriotic motives. "Did you purpose," said Judas, going to the point with characteristic directness, "to make this a common possession, or to take it for yourself?" Benjamin faltered under this searching question, and had no answer to give. Then Judas pronounced his sentence: "In old time he who had offended in this manner, as did Achan in the matter of the spoils of Jericho, died the death. These times are not equal to a justice so strict. But what the law enjoins that you will suffer. Were such sin as yours to go unpunished we could expect no blessing on our arms. We should become, not what we would be, the armies of the Lord, but a horde of robbers. You will receive forty stripes save one; if you offend again, you die."

Without a murmur the culprit bared his shoulders for the lash. When the whip had once fallen Judas stayed the executioner's hand. "Benjamin," he said, "you have done ill, but you have also done well. You saved from death our brother Seraiah as he lay wounded under the feet of the horsemen. For this good deed the rest of the punishment is remitted. Go, and sin no more."

Seraiah indeed had been so seriously wounded that he had to be carried back to the camp on a litter rudely constructed of boards, and Ruth was now

nursing him in the cave which had been originally set apart for their dwelling, and which they still retained. It was a miserable abode, though it at least afforded shelter from the rain. Indeed the lot of the women and children in the patriot encampment was full of suffering. The men had the constant excitement of their warfare to cheer them, but the women had only to toil and to endure. In the day the drought consumed them, and the frost by night. They had none of the comforts of life. Their food was coarse in the extreme, and often very scanty. But, perhaps, their greatest trial was in the matter of clothes. The stock which they had brought with them from their homes was, for the most part, worn out, and it was only on rare occasions, when some property of the heathen fell into the hands of the patriots, that any part of it could be replenished. Sheepskins and goatskins dried in the sun were commonly used, what remained of their wardrobes being reserved for special occasions.

Some time after the incident described above a serious trouble came upon Azariah. Miriam, his elder daughter, when she returned one day from her usual task of gathering herbs to eke out the family meal, complained of headache. It was evident that she was suffering from sunstroke. As the spring advanced the heat in some of the narrow mountain valleys became exceedingly oppressive, and the town-bred child felt it acutely. For some

days her life was in danger, all the greater because she had neither medical attendance nor skilful nursing. Ruth did all she could for the little sufferer, but then Ruth had her own husband to attend to, for, though recovering from his wound, he needed much care, and her child was still too young to be left alone. One or two visits in the day was all that she could give. For the most part the girl's father was her nurse, the little Judith giving such help as she could. Love gave a lightness and tenderness to his touch, and supplied the place of skill in that marvellous way which is so often possible to love. Day after day, as he sat by the bedside, and watched his charge, the girl's face, now pale and wasted, and aged as it was with suffering, reminded him more and more of his lost Hannah. He lived over the happy past that they had known before the evil days began, the time when their first acquaintance as youth and maiden had ripened into love, and the early years of their wedded life. Thus he began to live in a world of imagination, while the sordid circumstances of the present seemed to make no impression upon him, though he always retained a punctual recollection of the duties that belonged to his attendance upon the sick.

One day Ruth had come in to pay the daily visit for which, however engrossing her own occupations, she always contrived to find an opportunity. The

patient was in a sound sleep, with the little Judith for her sole attendant, Azariah having received an urgent summons to attend a council of war, in which some subject with which he was especially acquainted was to be discussed.

After a few minutes Azariah returned, but without any of the signs of agitation or haste that might be expected from one hurrying back to the performance of a duty that he had been compelled to neglect. His sister wondered to see him so calm, and she was still more surprised when he went on to say—

“ How like the child is growing to my dear Hannah ! ”

Ruth had often thought the same, but had not ventured to say so, for Azariah had never mentioned his dead wife.

“ Yes,” she answered, “ I have often thought so.”

“ I have had some happy times of late. Before I could not get out of my mind the dreadful sight of her face when I last saw it.” He paused for a moment, overpowered by the recollection, but soon resumed in a cheerful voice: “ But now in this dear child I seem to see her as she was in those happy Bethlehem days before our marriage, and again in the still happier time we had together in Jerusalem.”

“ But does it not trouble you to leave the child alone ? ”

“ Nay, sister, she is not alone. Nor do I speak of

our dear little Judith here." And he stroked the little girl's head, and bade her go and play outside, but be careful not to go into the sun.

"Believe me," he went on, "that when I am not here, Miriam's angel is with her. Perhaps you will think me mad when I say that I have seen, and that not once or twice only, the flash of white garments vanishing in the darkness as I came into the cave. And last night, as I sat here, dreaming, it may be, but certainly seeing everything in the cave as plainly as I see it this moment, the angel came with the little babe—our little David that my Hannah took with her to Paradise—to kiss his sick sister. And when Miriam awoke about an hour after dawn, the fever had left her."

At this moment the girl opened her eyes. "Oh, father," she cried, "did you indeed see little brother last night?—for I saw him too; but I did not see that an angel was carrying him. He seemed to be in the air somehow, with no one holding him up. And he had beautiful white clothes—not these nasty sheepskins and goatskins that we have to wear—and he stretched out his hands to me, and kissed me, and I felt that moment as if that dreadful burning had gone out of me. And oh! there was such a wonderful look upon his face. It was just like the look on dear mother's face that evening when the sun was just setting, and you took little brother up in your arms, and said his name was David."

Ruth could only listen to such talk with wonder and awe. But she went back to her husband and child with a lighter heart than she had borne for many days.

But a trouble was at hand which, though it had been for some time foreseen, was great enough to make private sorrows and anxieties seem inconsiderable. It was reported through the encampment that Mattathias, the father of his people, was dying.

The old man's health had been failing for some time. The hardships of his new life had told grievously upon it, all the more that he refused the exemption from labour which his age required. He had ceased to accompany the expeditions because he found that his presence hampered the movements of younger and stronger men, but the management of the multifarious affairs of the encampment—the home administration, as it may be called, of the patriotic movement—he kept in his own hands. Early and late he busied himself in this work, and before many weeks were past his labours wore him out.

He was well aware that the end had come, and that all that remained for him to do was to appoint a successor who should accomplish, or at least carry on—for he did not deceive himself as to the difficulty of the work—the task which he had commenced. All the leaders were summoned to his



The Last Charge of Matthias.

J. J. Jellicoe.

presence, the wounded Seraiah, for whose capacity and serene courage the old chief had a high regard, being carried thither on a litter. The old man was propped in his bed on cushions, the difficulty of breathing making it impossible for him to lie down. On either side stood his five sons, John, the eldest, being at his right hand, with Eleazar and Jonathan near him, while Simon and Judas were on the left. A physician, the solitary professor of the healing art that the camp possessed, sat by the bed's foot, with a cup of some cordial in his hand.

The old man began by laying his hand on John's head. "My son," he said, "for your loyalty and faithful obedience I thank the Lord that gave me so excellent a son for my first-born. You know what it is in my mind to do with respect to the succession of my work, and I am assured that you approve. But for the sake of those that stand by,"—and he pointed to the assembled chiefs—"I solemnly declare that for no defect of courage or honesty I pass you by. And say if you are content to leave it according to what seems best to my judgment."

"Father," said the faithful John, "I am content."

Simon beckoned to the physician; who handed the cup of cordial to the dying man. He swallowed a few drops, and then went on :

"Hear, my friends and brethren. In the distribution of my worldly goods I follow custom and law. The inheritance of my fathers I give to my

eldest born, according to the custom of the birth-right ; and I direct that the younger shall have such portions as are due to them. But I have that to give which has been entrusted to me of the Lord, and with which I must deal according to His pleasure, so far as it is given to me to know it. Simon, I will that thou be the father of the people. Care for them as for thy children. Do justice between man and man. Strive to the utmost that they keep the Law of the Lord their God. He has given thee prudence and discernment and knowledge of the customs of our fathers. See that thou use these things for the glory of the Lord and the good of the people. Judas, I will that thou be captain of the host. Be stout and of a good courage, and the Lord shall fight on thy side, and give thee the victory. The end is not yet, and maybe thou wilt not see it with thine eyes ; but, though it tarry, wait for it. ‘ For they that go on their way weeping, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with joy, and bring their sheaves with them.’ ”

He then addressed a few words to the two other sons, words of mingled encouragement and advice. This done he stretched out his hands, and, with a voice of surprising firmness in one so weak, blessed the whole assembly, repeated the usual profession of an Israelite’s faith, and then drew his last breath without a struggle.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BURIAL OF MATTATHIAS.

JUDAS and his brothers sat late into the night consulting about a daring scheme which the new captain of the host proposed.

“It would be an unseemly thing,” he said, “that Mattathias, the son of Asmon, should be thrust into a hole among the rocks as if he were an outcast or a robber. Verily we will bury him with his fathers in the sepulchre of Asmon.”

“Twill be no easy matter to contrive,” said Jonathan, the man of many devices. “The sepulchre is hard by the town, and we can scarcely avoid the eyes of the people in coming and going.”

“Nay, Jonathan, I have no purpose of doing the thing in secret. It would not be well to bury my father by stealth in his own sepulchre. It shall be done openly, and before the eyes of men.”

The brothers, bold men as they were, were aston-

ished at the hardihood of the plan. But their respect for the genius of Judas silenced any opposition. And then he had never failed in any enterprise. John was the first to speak.

“ ‘Tis well thought of, Judas. Lead the way, and I follow;” and he clasped his brother’s hand.

The captain then developed his plan, which, when examined, seemed less audacious than it had appeared at first sight. It was to be a surprise, and the very unlikeness of the attempt made its success more probable. Modin was not occupied by a garrison, and the townsfolk, even if their goodwill could not be counted on, would scarcely venture to resist. Only it would be necessary to act before any rumour of their intention could get about, and, the funeral march once begun, to hasten it to a completion as much as possible.

The body was at once preserved against decay as far as the scanty means at the command of the patriots would allow. Then word was sent through the encampment that all who wished to take their last look at the dead hero must come at once. For three hours a constant stream of awestruck and weeping visitors passed through the tent in which he lay, attired in his priestly garb, the long white beard reaching almost to his waist, his wasted features settled into the majestic repose of death. Every visitor as he entered loosed his sandals from his feet, feeling that the place which he was entering was

holy ground. Every one, as he took his last look on the hero's face, prayed to the God of his fathers that his last end might be like his. Women brought their children that they might kiss the hem of his garment. It would be a distinction to them in their old age that they had been privileged to pay this honour to Mattathias, the son of Asmon.

Before dawn the procession started. The body, in its rude coffin of wood, was placed upon a bier, thirty bearers taking it in turns to carry it. The thirty were divided into five relays of six, one of the sons of the dead being always among those who performed the duty. With the exception of a small force which was left for the protection of the women and children, all the fighting men of the settlement accompanied the body. In spite of the efforts which had been made to procure or manufacture arms, they were still but poorly equipped. Of military display, of the "pomp and circumstance of glorious war," there was absolutely nothing. But the solid qualities of endurance and courage could be seen in their sinewy forms and resolute faces. To an observer who could look below the surface that squalid array had in it the capacity for achieving an heroic success.

Judas had been quite right in predicting that the expedition would meet with little or no opposition. Its march, indeed, was absolutely unmolested by the enemy. The movement was wholly unexpected, and

consequently no force had been collected to hinder it; while the garrisons of the two or three fortified places which the army passed on its route did not feel themselves strong enough to attempt any attack. Already, though as yet no pitched battle had been fought, these Jewish "Ironsides" had inspired their enemies with a wholesome dread of their prowess. Both Greeks and renegades knew that these ragged, ill-armed mountaineers stood as stoutly and plied their swords as fiercely as any soldiers in the world.

No incident occurred in the course of the march save one, which, though little thought of at the time, was destined to lead to events of considerable importance. When the first halt was called, Benjamin, who was a well-known personage in the neighbourhood, and who in spite, perhaps in consequence, of his antecedents enjoyed not a little popularity, found entertainment in the house of an old acquaintance. The man was a farmer, who had been accustomed to make a handsome profit by supplying the bandits with useful information. Recognizing his old accomplice in the ranks of the patriot army, he invited him into his house, and entertained him with his best. Unfortunately this best happened to be some salted swine's flesh. Benjamin had some scruple about eating it; but it was not strong enough to resist the claims of a ravenous hunger, supported as they were by his entertainer's ridicule.

The meal was washed down by the contents of two or three flasks of potent wine, and the friends were so busily occupied with discussing these, and with talking over old times, that the signal for assembly passed unnoticed. Then followed a search for stragglers, and Benjamin was discovered with the fragments of his meal before him ; and though his hunger had stripped the bones bare enough, no one could doubt what was the animal to which they had belonged.

The offender had been caught, so to speak, red-handed, and some voices were raised to demand his instant execution. But the officer in command of the detachment interposed. In any case he would have objected to a proceeding of which Judas would certainly have disapproved, and he had besides a certain kindness for Benjamin, of whose courage and dexterity he had been more than once a witness. Accordingly the offender was put under close arrest, and the army resumed its march.

Benjamin had no need to be told that he was in very serious danger. The Chasidim, at least, would be more ready to overlook fifty thefts than one transgression in the matter of unclean food ; and he felt sure that if he could not contrive to escape before the army returned to the encampment, possibly before they reached Modin, his days were numbered. While he was meditating on the chances of escape, one of the escort, an associate of former days, was

thinking how he could help him. Happening to be in front of the prisoner, he purposely stumbled and fell. The prisoner fell over him, and in the confusion the soldier cut the cords that bound Benjamin's hands. The prisoner was not a man to lose such an opportunity. Waiting till he reached a convenient spot on the march, he shook off his bonds, sprang to the side of the road, and, before his keepers could recover from their astonishment, was lost to sight in the woods which bordered it.

When the army reached Modin no attempt was made to interfere with its proceedings. Our old acquaintance, Cleon, had been sent to replace the commissioner killed when Mattathias raised the standard of revolt, and Cleon was far too careful of himself to risk his safety in any foolhardy struggle against superior strength. When the body of armed men was first seen approaching the town, he had supposed that its object was to possess itself of any money, arms, or provisions that might be found in the place. A nearer view showed the funeral procession, and one of the townspeople was acute enough to guess the real purpose of the expedition. Cleon's resolve was at once taken. He would make the best of circumstances which he could not control. Accordingly he went out of the town with a flag of truce in his hand, and meeting the vanguard of the approaching array, demanded an interview with its leader.

He was brought into the presence of Judas.

“May I ask,” he said, “the purpose of your coming?”

“We are come to bury Mattathias, son of Asmon, in the sepulchre of his fathers,” was the brief reply.

“And you, sir,” continued the Greek, with elaborate courtesy, “may I ask to whom I am speaking?”

“I am Judas, son of Mattathias.”

“Allow me, then,” answered Cleon, “to express my sympathy with you in the loss of so renowned a father, once, I believe, a distinguished citizen of this place, and to assure you that you will meet with no molestation in whatever honours you may see fit to render to his memory. I would myself willingly attend the obsequies, did I suppose that my presence would be welcome.”

“We thank you, sir,” said Judas, who was inwardly chafing at this hypocritical politeness, but disdained to show his feelings; “we would sooner be alone.”

Cleon saluted and withdrew.

The funeral ceremonies were performed with an impressive solemnity. The stone which closed the entrance to the family tomb of the house of Asmon had been rolled away, and the dead body was placed in the niche which had been long ago prepared for its reception. Only the sons of Mattathias and a few

of their best trusted counsellors and lieutenants entered the cave ; the rest of the multitude stood without, waiting in profound silence till they should be told that the old warrior had been laid in his last resting-place.

When the cave had been closed again John, as the eldest son of the deceased, spoke a few words to the army.

“ We have buried our dead,” he said, “ out of our sight ; but his memory lives and will live among us. Let us be true and faithful as he was, that we may be with him when he shall rise again at the last day, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the supper of the people of God. Meanwhile let us follow and obey him whom with his last breath he named as his successor. Long live Judas, son of Mattathias, son of Asmon, the captain of the host of the Lord ! ”

And all the army shouted their approval.

Cleon had followed up his courtesies by an invitation addressed to Judas and his principal officers, in which he begged the honour of their company at a meal. Judas declined the invitation, but intimated that he would gladly purchase a supply of corn. The commissioner, well aware that his guests could take by force anything that was refused to them, at once acceded to the request, and Micah was selected, on account of his familiarity with the Greek language, to conduct the transaction.

The details of the business arranged with the commissioner's secretary, Micah received a message from the great man himself, begging for the pleasure of an interview.

"What!" cried Cleon, affecting a surprise which he did not really feel, "is this my old friend Menander whom I see?"

"My name is Micah," said the Jew, not without a feeling of disgust and shame as his mind reverted to the past.

"As you please," said Cleon. "By whatever name you may please to call yourself, I hope that we shall always be good friends. But tell me, what is the meaning of this disguise?"

"I know not what you mean by disguise."

"I mean these rags, which a scarecrow would hardly condescend to wear; that battered helmet, which looks as if the boys had been kicking it for a month about the market-place; that deplorably shabby sword, which even a rag-and-bone man would be ashamed to hang up in his shop. Is this the elegant Menander — I beg your pardon, the elegant Micah, who was once the very pink of neatness and fashion?"

"As for my past follies, you may laugh at them as you will, nor can I deny that you are in the right. But of these rags, as you are pleased to call them, of these shabby arms, I am not ashamed. I have come to myself. The things that I once prized I

count as dung, and for that which I once despised I would gladly die."

"Why, what madness is this? What have you got to live for? How can you support existence among this deplorable crew of beggars and outlaws, with not a man among them, I will warrant, who has the least taste of culture, or the faintest tincture of art?"

"These 'beggars and outlaws,' as you call them, are the soldiers of the Lord; and you will find that they are enemies not to be despised, that these battered helmets can turn a blow, and these jagged swords can deal one that will make its way through all your finery."

"But, my dear friend — I may call you so, I suppose, in spite of any little difference of opinion there may be between us?"

The Jew made no motion of assent.

"Well, you cannot be deceiving yourself as to the utter hopelessness of your attempt. Why, when you come to meet our troops in regular battle, you will disappear like chaff before the wind. You may take a few places by surprise, but you have no more chance of winning a regular victory than a dove has of killing a kite. Come now, be reasonable; give up this silly affair, and be my guest, till we can find something suitable for you to do. I will set you up with some new clothes, to which you are perfectly welcome. And I will warrant that in a few days

you will be wondering that you were ever foolish enough to undertake such a wildgoose business as this."

"Your gifts be to yourself. Nay, Cleon," he soon went on to say, in a softer tone, "I would not speak harshly to you for the sake of old kindnesses which I doubt not you meant well in showing me. But be sure that I am in earnest. The old things are hateful to me. I have other desires, other hopes; and if they are not satisfied, not fulfilled, I can at least die for them."

"Die for them, indeed! *That*, my dear Micah, is only too likely, and die, I am afraid, in an exceedingly unpleasant way. It is simple madness to suppose that a crowd of ragamuffins, under a general—Apollo save the mark!—who has never seen a battle, can stand against the troops of the King. You used to be a very good fellow, Menander or Micah, or whatever you call yourself, but, as sure as you are sitting there, if you go on in this mad fashion, I shall have the pain of seeing you some day hanging on a cross."

At the sound of the word the young Jew started as if he had been stabbed. It opened the way for a flood of memories which, for a while, carried him out of himself. When he could command himself sufficiently to speak, he burst out—

"Yes—hanging on a cross! Nothing more likely if only you and your friends get their way. You talk

of taste, and art, and beauty: you have always plenty of fine words on your tongues, but when it comes to practice you are as brutal as the fiercest of the savages whom you profess to despise —nay, you are ten times worse, for you know what you are doing. Now, listen to me, Cleon. Some six months ago I was walking through Jerusalem after your teachers of culture and art had been busy giving their lessons. What think you I saw? I saw a woman hanging on a cross, and her little son, a babe of a few days old, fastened about her neck. Thank God they were dead. Some one of your people had in mercy—for you are not altogether without mercy—strangled her before they fastened her to the cross. And what was her offence? Was she unchaste, a thief, a murderer? Not so; no purer, gentler soul ever lived on the earth. No, she had done for her son as her fathers for a thousand years and more had done for their sons. And this was how your prophets of refinement and beauty dealt with her. Cleon, that woman was my sister. Do you think that such deeds as that will go unpunished? Surely not; whether your faith—if you have a faith—or mine be true, there is a vengeance that follows—slow, it may be, but sure of foot—the men who work such wickedness. And, for my part, I doubt not who the first minister of that vengeance will be. You sneer at our general; he is no general at all, you think; a mere leader of

vagabonds, who has never seen a battle. He will see many a battle, yea, and the back of many a foe, before his work is done. He is a very Hammer of God, and he will break his enemies to pieces. And now, Cleon, hearken again to me. You and I have broken bread together as friends. That is past for ever. May the God of my fathers send down upon me all the plagues that He holds in the vials of His wrath, if I have any truce with the enemies of His people! But with you, as I would not join hands in friendship, so I would not cross them in anger. Pray, therefore, to your gods, as I will certainly pray to Him whom I worship, that we may never see each other again. And now farewell!"

The expedition returned to the mountains without mishap.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SWORD OF APOLLONIUS.

THE daring action of Judas at Modin was a defiance to the rulers at Jerusalem, and felt to be so, not only by them, but by the whole country. It was followed up by active operations on the part of the patriots against the smaller towns of south-eastern Palestine. The population began to feel that it was safer to be on the side of the patriots than against them. Thanks to this feeling, to the genuine favour with which the movement was regarded, and to the perfect system of scouts which he had organized, Judas had early and trustworthy information of all the movements of the enemy. Apollonius had made up his mind that he must act if he was not to lose entirely his hold upon the country, and set about organizing a force so overwhelmingly strong that it must, he thought, sweep the insurgents before it. This intention, and indeed, it may almost be said, every detail of his preparations, was communicated to Judas. He, on his part, was determined that a

heathen army should never again invade the mountain sanctuary. He would not await attack. His military instincts, which, indeed, were extraordinarily fine and true, warned him that boldness was now his best policy, and that he should go down and give battle to the enemy.

It was on the eve of the departure of the patriot army, when Seraiah might have been seen making his way back from a conference of the chiefs to the cave which served him as a dwelling. He was now recovering from his wound, but he was still too weak to support the fatigues of a march. Accordingly Judas had left him in command of the little garrison, scarcely, indeed, containing one able-bodied man, which was to protect the encampment. When he reached his home he found his nieces, Miriam and Judith, sitting with his wife, and watching the infant that was slumbering by her side.

“ See,” said Judith, as the child smiled in his sleep, “ his angel is whispering to him. Oh, uncle, have you ever seen the angel ? ”

She prattled on without waiting for an answer. “ Father sees angels, and they bring him words from mother, where she is in Paradise. And, do you know, uncle, last night he had a wonderful dream about a sword ? He told it to us this morning. He often tells us his dreams. Sometimes he seems as if he were talking to mother ; and he says that Miriam is so like her.”

“ Well, Judith, and what was the dream ? ” said Ruth.

“ Father saw a mighty angel—one of the cherubim, you know, that father says God sends abroad to do His errands—come flying down, and the angel had in his hand a great sword. And he stood by father’s bed, and showed him a name graven on the blade—it was the name which we may not speak, though it is part of father’s name¹—and when he had done this he put the hilt in his hand and departed. Then father awoke, and found only his own old sword in his hand ; and this, you know, is so hacked that it is not of much use, and is very weak, too, in the handle. Father never sleeps without it, and he must have drawn it out in his sleep, without knowing it, from under the pillow where he keeps it. But he says the dream will certainly come true. And now, Miriam,” she went on, turning to her sister, for the little maiden was of the true housewife temper, “ we must be going back to get father’s dinner ready for him.”

When they were left alone Seraiah said to Ruth, “ It is as I feared—I am to stay behind.”

Ruth felt a thrill of joy go through her, but was too wise a woman to show it.

“ Old Reuben will not hear of my going. He says that I should be more hindrance than help, and perhaps he is right. The Lord’s will be done,

¹ Azariah, holpen of Jehovah.

though I would fain have struck a blow in the battle that is to decide ; for I am sure that as this battle goes, so will the end be. But I am to be in command of the garrison here."

" And you will not mind taking care of the women and children, dear husband ? " said Ruth.

" I should be ungrateful indeed if I did," said Seraiah, as he kissed her.

Meanwhile the excitement in the camp had risen to fever heat. Scouts had come racing in at headlong speed with tidings that the enemy's army had started from Jerusalem, and that it numbered not less than twelve thousand regular troops, well-equipped, and furnished with a formidable supply of the engines of war. The patriots were in that state of exaltation in which men make little of the numbers opposed to them, and the disparity of forces roused no apprehensions. If any such were felt they gave way to rage when the messengers added that the hated Apollonius himself was in command of the hostile army.

Azariah and Micah were among a small company of chiefs who were standing outside the tent of Judas, and were discussing the prospects of the war.

" The curse of God light upon him ! " cried Azariah. " Surely He will so order it that I may smite him down on the field of battle, and avenge the innocent blood ! Surely the blood of my wife and my child cries against him from the earth ! "

“ Nay, brother,” broke in Micah, “ the task of the avenger of blood lies upon me, for I am next-of-kin to Hannah.”

“ Surely,” replied Azariah, with some heat, “ there is no kinship so close as the tie which binds husband to wife ! ’Tis I that should be Hannah’s avenger of blood.”

“ My brothers,” broke in the voice of Judas, who appeared in the door of his tent, “ you think too much of your private wrongs. Great they are, I know—none greater. But is there one soldier in this army that has not lost wife, or child, or father, or brother by the hand of this evil man ? We will go, one and all, as avengers of blood, and the Lord will deliver him into the hands of him whom He shall choose.”

Next day the army set out. On the evening of the second day they came in sight of the forces of Apollonius. Some of the more fiery spirits were for an instant attack, but the prudence of Judas, which was not less conspicuous than his daring, restrained them. His men were wearied with a long day’s march, and they wanted food. And he himself had not had time to reconnoitre the enemy’s position or receive any intelligence from his scouts.

Early next day the battle began. In one sense Judas was greatly overmatched. The enemy were superior in numbers—almost in the proportion of four to one—and in equipment. But, on the other hand,

the Hebrew leader could rely implicitly on his soldiers. Anything that mortal man, inspired by zeal and the burning sense of wrong, could achieve, they might be trusted to do. To such a temper, of course, the policy of attack is best suited. Judas massed his best troops on his right wing, which happened to be opposed to what his eagle eye discerned to be the weakest part of the enemy's line. Apollonius saw his intention, and commenced a movement of troops which was designed to strengthen the weak point in his array. But such a movement in the face of a hostile force cannot be carried out without confusion. Judas saw his opportunity, ordered his men to advance at the double, and closed fiercely with the foe.

The Greek line broke almost at once, and the chief danger now was that the conquerors might press on too eagerly. The Greeks were not an undisciplined mob which could be treated with contempt. Some of them, at least, were veteran soldiers, in whom the sense of discipline was an instinct, and who, if not very enthusiastic in the cause for which they were fighting, were perfectly well aware that their best chance of personal safety was to be found in keeping together and holding their ground. Judas, in whom native genius seemed to supply the want of experience, appreciated the enemy with whom he had to deal, and kept his own men well in hand, though he was careful not unduly to check their courage.

The fortune of the day continued to declare in favour of the patriots; but Apollonius himself, surrounded by a picked force of mercenaries, still held his ground. Shortly after noon Azariah and Micah, who had kept close together during the battle, and had both performed prodigies of valour, gathering a company of their immediate followers, made a determined rush in his direction. The bodyguard, terrified by the fierceness of this onset, wavered and fled, leaving but three or four faithful attendants, who refused to leave their commander.

The Greek recognized Azariah, and called to him by his name. “Azariah, if you think that I have wronged you, I do not refuse you the opportunity of revenge. Come out from your companions, and I will meet you alone. You are a brave man, and would not take a soldier at unfair odds.”

Azariah did not deign to answer; but one of his comrades replied, “Dog of a heathen! you forget where you are. We are not contending in your foolish games: we are the avengers of blood—the innocent blood which you have shed; and we will slay you as men slay a venomous snake. Such equity as you have dealt to others, we will show to you. Was it in fair fight that you slew women and children?”

Apollonius looked on the ring of scowling faces that surrounded him, and saw that there was no mercy or even what he would have called the

courtesy of war to be hoped from them. "I only wish," he said, "that I had rooted out the whole cursed brood from the earth, and burnt the den of thieves which you call your city, and laid the shrine of the demon whom you call your God level with the ground!"

"Silence, blasphemer!" cried Azariah, as he whirled his sword over his head.

It was not the almost worthless weapon, with its dented edge and broken hilt, that he had carried into the battle. Early in the day he had cut down a Greek officer, and taken the sword of the dead man in exchange for his own.

As he spoke he beckoned to his countrymen. They stood back, even Micah recognizing the right of the husband to strike the first blow at the murderer of his wife.

Apollonius raised his sword to parry the stroke which he expected to be aimed at his head. With a rapid change of movement his adversary changed the blow into a thrust, and drove the point of his weapon through the Greek's heart.

Azariah was drawing out his weapon from the corpse, when Judas, who had been hastening to the spot not without some hope of himself crossing swords with the hated Apollonius, came up.

"A mighty weapon that!" he exclaimed, as the conqueror wiped the blade on the dead man's tunic.
"Let me take it in my hands."

He poised it and judged its balance, tried the edge, and then narrowly scanned the markings on the blade.

“ Ah ! ” said he, “ how came you by this sword ? I had observed ”—and indeed his eagle eye noted every detail—“ that yours was but a poor weapon, unworthy of your strength, and I wished to find something better for you.”

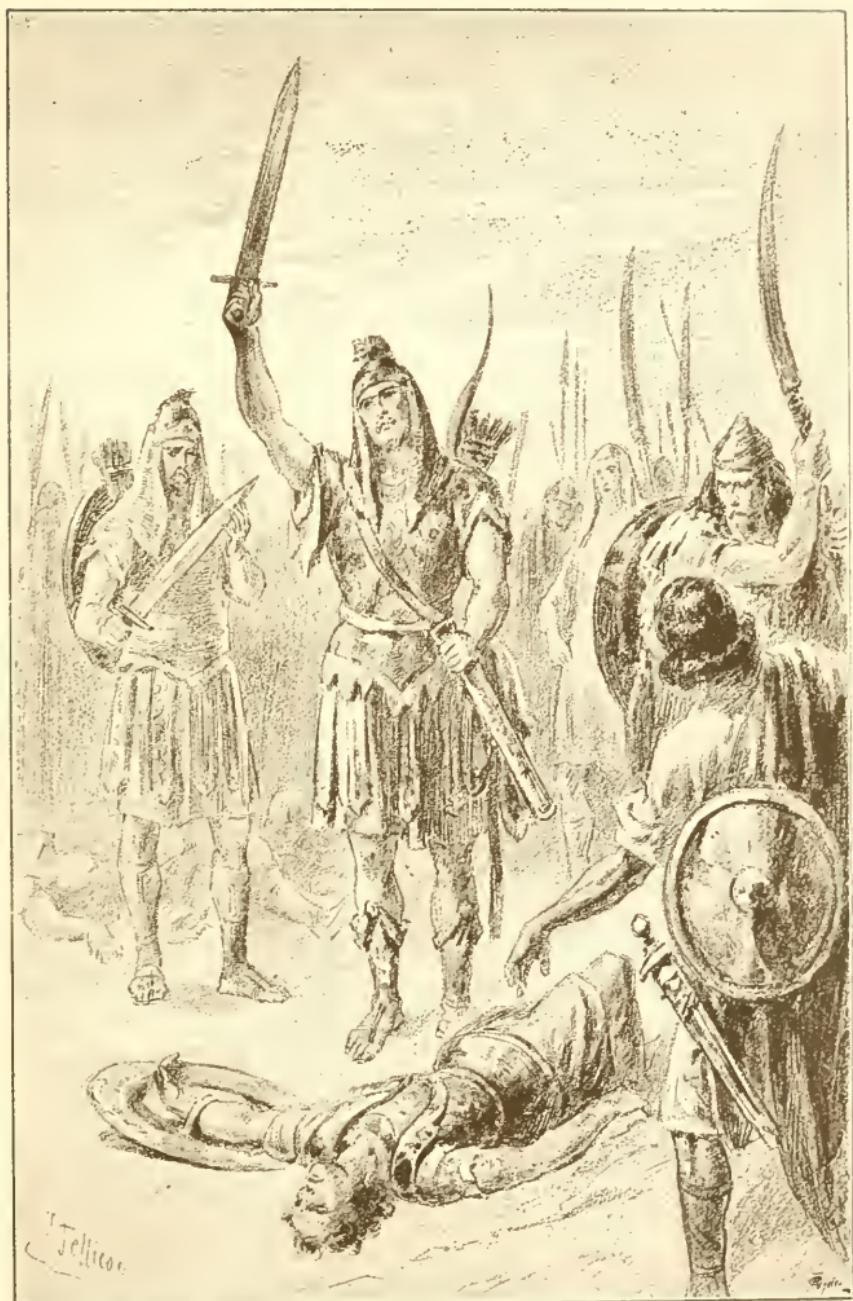
Azariah told him how he had taken it from a Greek on the field of battle.

“ And saw you this ? ” he went on, pointing to the Holy Name which had been engraved on the blade. “ Doubtless this belonged to some Hebrew warrior in time past, for the fashion of the letters is somewhat antique ; the heathen whom you slew had taken it, and now the Lord has given it back into the hands of the faithful.”

Azariah then related his dream.

“ The angel whom you saw,” said Judas, “ was, doubtless, the angel of battle, and the Lord has been faithful, as ever, to His promise.”

He gave back the consecrated sword to Azariah, and took the weapon which was still grasped in the right hand of the dead Apollonius. “ With this,” he said, “ I will fight as long as I live.” And he broke out into the triumphal chant of the Psalmist—“ The ungodly have drawn out the sword, and have bent the bow to cast down the poor and needy. Their sword shall go through their own heart and their bow shall be broken.”



The Sword of Apollonius.

CHAPTER XVI.

NEWS FROM THE BATTLE-FIELD.

WHILE the patriots, bivouacking on the field of battle, slept the sound sleep of those who have fought a good fight, the women, left, with the children and the sick, in charge of a small guard, only strong enough to protect them against casual robbers, felt the most intense anxiety. Ruth in her cave, with the children slumbering by her side, watched through the night, listening intently to every sound. At one time she could hear the bats which haunted the rocks flapping and fluttering as they went out to take their flights in the night air. Then from farther away came the moaning of the jackals, as they hunted for their prey, with now and then the deeper note of a wolf, or the sound, so strangely like to mocking laughter, of the hooting owls. Everything at that moment seemed very dark and hopeless to the anxious wife.

“ ‘Tis everywhere the same,” she thought to herself—“the stronger hunt and devour the weak. The lions roaring after their prey, do seek their meat from God. The lambs and the fawns are their prey, and God gives the helpless, innocent things into their jaws. And will he give us to the jaws of the heathen who are hunting us that they may devour us? Did He deliver the thousand who died that they might not profane His Sabbath? Not so. He suffered them to perish, to be a prey for the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air. ‘Verily our bones lie scattered before the pit, like as when one breaketh and heweth wood upon the earth.’ ”

And then her thoughts travelled to those who were especially close to her heart. Azariah and Micah—where were they? How had it fared with them in the battle? Were they lying on the field of battle with stark faces turned to the stars of heaven, and the vultures preying on their limbs? And she shuddered, and hid her face in the coarse coverlet under which she lay, as if she would shut out the dreadful picture that her thoughts had conjured up before her.

When she opened her eyes again, there was a faint suspicion of light in the darkness of the cave. The bats came flapping back from the outer air to their haunts in the roof. Jael, the jackal, who had been for her nightly prowl came back with her cubs, and lay down in her accustomed corner. The

light grew rapidly stronger, and when Ruth stepped from the threshold of the cave into the fresh morning air, though the sun was not visible, its light had begun to touch the highest summits of the mountains.

Looking to the head of the pass Ruth could see her husband where he stood at his post of observation, a spot which commanded a distant view of the westward approaches to the encampment. As she watched him she observed him make a signal that indicated that he had to make some important communication. A moment afterwards she could see other men hurrying to the spot. She bade Miriam and Judith, who were always her guests during their father's absence, watch the still sleeping infant, and made all the haste she could to join her husband. When she reached him she found the little group of watchers straining their eyes as they gazed at a body of armed men that could be seen in the distance. "Who are they? foes or friends?" was the question that was in every heart, though none ventured to put it into words.

As the vanguard of the approaching force came to an eastward turn in the path, a ray of sunshine touched the helmets of the men and made them glitter.

"What is this?" said one of the men. "They went with caps of leather; whence come these helmets of brass and steel?"

A shudder went through the hearts of Ruth and of the other women who by this time had joined her. If the patriots had been overpowered, and these armed men were heathen murderers and ravishers come to wreak their vengeance on those who had been left behind—

“Whence come they?” said Seraiah. “They are the spoils of the heathen.”

As he spoke the distant sound of singing was carried by the wind up the pass, and though the words could not as yet be heard it was recognized at once as one of the Temple chants. The little band of sentries and women raised a joyful shout, and hurried down the pass to meet the new comers. And now the noble voice of Judas could be heard leading the song of triumph. “Thou hast girded me with strength unto the battle; Thou shalt throw down mine enemies under me. Thou hast made mine enemies also to turn their backs upon me; and I shall destroy them that hate me. . . . I will beat them as small as the dust before the wind.” And now the good news had spread like wildfire through the camp. The rest of the women hastened down to meet and greet the deliverers, and among them Miriam and Judith, carrying Ruth’s infant child. The first thought of all was to do honour to the chief who had led the host of the Lord to victory. They kissed the hem of his robe, his hands, even his feet. It was only when they had satisfied

these feelings of gratitude and reverence that they could think of private affections. And when the whole array, the women and children now mingling in the ranks with the armed men, reached the top of the pass, it halted for a few minutes. The name which Micah, in his talk with Cleon, had given to Judas had passed through the army, and had caught the popular fancy. There was scarcely a man among them but had seen him dealing death at every blow among the ranks of the heathen. “Hail, Judah Maccâbah! Hail, Hammer of God!” was the cry that went up from the assembled multitude. The title has been given in after times to other sturdy champions of the truth, notably to him who, in the Valley of Tours, turned back the tide of Paynim invasion; ¹ but never has it been more honourably gained, or more worthily borne, than it was by Judas, the son of Mattathias.

Great as was the exultation of the patriots over their victory, no one among them, and least of all their far-sighted general, deceived himself with the flattering notion that it had finished the war. Every one was well aware that the defeat and death of Apollonius was not only a disgrace that Antiochus and his lieutenants were bound to avenge, but a disaster that had to be repaired. It was with-

¹ Charles Martel defeated the Saracens between Poictiers and Tours (A.D. 732).

out surprise, therefore, that Judas heard that Seron, Governor of Coele-Syria, was marching southwards over the great maritime plain known by the name of Sharon, with what rumour described as a vast host.

Judas at once resolved to repeat the policy which had been found so successful in the conflict with Apollonius. The enemy would soon reach the passes that led into the hill-country of Eastern Palestine ; and it was there that he must be met. To allow him to make good this movement without opposition would be to throw away a great advantage. The Jewish commander resolved, accordingly, to dispute the possession of the pass. With a boldness which seemed to some of his followers to verge upon rashness, he left Jerusalem, occupied as it was by a hostile garrison, behind him, and marched westward till he reached the range which looks over the Plain of Sharon to the Great Sea.

This strategy was simple enough, though it was not wanting in boldness ; but then came the difficult question, “What road will the enemy take—the ordinary route by Emmaüs,¹ or the more difficult way through the pass of Beth-horon ?” The scouts were at fault, but it seemed likely that a general strange to the country would prefer the easier course. But scarcely had Judas acted on this probability and taken up his position on the plateau

¹ Not to be confounded with the village near Jerusalem.

of Emmaüs, than a breathless messenger came rushing in with the intelligence that Beth-horon was to be the point of attack. The patriots had already been in motion since dawn, but another march was necessary, and, if it was to be of any avail, must be executed at full speed, and without any pause for food or rest. There had been just time to reach the head of the pass, and to hide the vanguard behind rocks and in the ravines that led into the main road, when the Greek force was seen to be approaching. It was still a mile distant, and as the road was steep, making a rise of not less than five hundred feet in the mile, its progress was slow. It was an anxious time of waiting as the patriots watched the hostile column drawing nearer and nearer. They could see its strength, its dense and numerous files, the discipline showed by the precision of its march, and its complete equipment, so different from their own imperfect supply of weapons and armour. And there were some whose hearts fainted within them at the sight. "How shall we, being so few, be able to stand up against so great and strong a multitude? And now we are worn with marching, and weak for want of bread." Judas was indefatigable in cheering and encouraging them. "With the Lord our God," he said, as he went from one company to another, "it is all one to deliver with a great multitude, or with a small company." Then he pointed to Ajalon, and recalled to

the thoughts of his hearers the famous associations of the place. "Do you not remember," he said, "how Joshua, the son of Nun, smote the five kings of the Canaanites? The Lord was with him, staying even the sun and the moon in their course, that He might give to His people the heritage of the heathen, and surely He will be with us on this day, for His name's sake, that he may restore to us this same heritage. His enemies come against us in the pride of their hearts to destroy us, and our wives, and our children. But the Lord is on our side; and He will overthrow them before our face. And as for you, be not afraid of them. Stand fast and quit you like men." He had not completed the round of his force—and indeed there were some companies in it which he knew to be of temper so sturdy that they might safely be left to themselves—when the Greeks, slowly labouring in their heavy armour up the ascent, came within reach. Judas gave the signal, and with a loud cry, "The Hammer of God! The Hammer of God!" the patriots rose from their ambush, and threw themselves on the van of the enemy. The attack was entirely unexpected, for the Greek commander was ill-served by his scouts, and it met with no serious resistance. Almost in a moment the Greek line was broken, and a wild flight commenced. When the fugitives reached the plain they scattered themselves in all directions. With his usual prudence, Judas checked

his men in their pursuit of the vanquished, but eight hundred lay dead or seriously wounded upon the plain.

Seraiah, who had extorted from the old physician attached to the patriot army an unwilling permission to bear arms, had fallen fainting to the ground, close to the entrance to the pass. Near him lay six or seven Greek corpses. The tide of battle had passed elsewhere, and the place was deserted. This was exactly the opportunity which Benjamin and his associates—since his escape during the expedition to Modin he had gathered about him a small band—had been watching. They issued from their hiding-places among the rocks, and began to search the prostrate bodies for spoil. The first that they came to was a Greek sub-officer, somewhat richly attired. The man was still alive and groaned as they turned him over to get more conveniently at the silver ornaments of his belt. “Curse the villain!” cried Benjamin, as he drove his sword into his side; and when the poor wretch breathed his last, went on, “A brave man might have been left to take his chance, but such cowards as these ‘tis positively a good work to despatch. Did you ever see such a scandalous flight?—and they were positively five to one at the very least.”

It was now Seraiah’s turn to be stripped. He, too, gave signs of life, and one of the robbers, an Edomite, who hated Jews and Greeks impartially,

was about to stab him, when Benjamin, who recognized his old comrade's face, interfered.

"Nay, man," he said, "'tis one of the patriots, and an old friend of mine to boot. Look you after the others, and I will attend to this brave fellow."

Hastily and with a practised hand he bound up Seraiah's wound, for the old place had broken out afresh. The injured man, consumed by the thirst that follows the loss of blood, begged for water. Benjamin supplied him with a draught from the bottle which he carried, and followed it up with some rough wine of the country in a wooden cup. By this time the robbers, who had finished their work of spoiling the dead, were ready to return to their hiding-place among the hills.

"Come, captain," said the Edomite, "'tis time to go; you had best leave your friend to himself, or you will see more of his countrymen than you will quite like."

"Go," said Benjamin; "I will follow you soon."

Seraiah was now sufficiently revived to be able to sit up. The robber offered him bread and flesh. "'Tis clean meat," he said. The wounded man, however, refused it. It might be of a lawful kind, but he did not know that it had been lawfully killed, and he contented himself with bread to which he added a few raisins with which he happened to have provided himself. Another draught of wine completed the repast.

“ Benjamin,” he said, when he had finished, “ you are too good for this life, for these friends. Come with us and fight on our side, for be sure that it is the side of the Lord. I will intercede for you to our captain, and he is as merciful as he is strong.”

“ Nay, nay,” said Benjamin, “ you are too confident; yours may be the side of the Lord, for I don’t know much about these things, but the side of the Lord, as far as I have been able to see, does not always win. I hate these Greeks. They robbed me of my house and everything that I had. May all the curses that are written in the Law overtake them! But they are very likely to get the best of it after all.”

“ Did you see how they fled to-day?” cried Seraiah.

“ Yes; you made them run,” said the robber, with a grim laugh. “ It was rare sport to see them pelt helter-skelter down the pass, like so many sheep with a dog after them. But there are many more where these came from, and they will simply trample you down.”

“ That will not be done so easily as you think. Is Judas the Hammer—for that is what the people call him—a likely man to be so dealt with? Nay, Benjamin, he is another Joshua, another David, and I am as sure as if a prophet had told me that the Lord of Hosts is with him, and will deliver the heathen into his hands.”

Benjamin was silent awhile. Then he said, in an altered tone, "You say the truth about Judas, the son of Mattathias. A better captain to lead, a better soldier to strike with the sword, I never saw. I would gladly follow him. And verily I would sooner fight for my people than for my own hand. But your ways are over-strict. I cannot put up with these "religious" as you call them. Why should I not eat pig's flesh if I can get it? It has a good relish, and it has never harmed me yet."

"But 'tis forbidden, Benjamin," gently answered Seraiah, now in good hopes of winning over this somewhat stubborn proselyte, "and you are too good a man to give up your country for a matter of meat or drink."

"Aye," said the man, "but there are other things."

"Nothing surely that cannot be borne," went on Seraiah. "Oh, Benjamin, you have saved my life to-day, and henceforth you are my brother; but I could almost wish, but for my wife and child's sake —you remember Ruth and the babe?—that you had left me to die, if I am to see you return to the ways of death."

The cause was almost won when, at an unhappy moment, a party of Jewish soldiers returning from the pursuit came in sight. One of them immediately recognized Benjamin, and gave the alarm

to his companions. They rushed to arrest him, but Benjamin divined their purpose and dashed up the rocks. To overtake him was impossible, for he was fleet of foot and unencumbered; but one of the Chasidim, for the soldiers belonged to this party, let fly an arrow which struck him in the left arm. It was but a slight wound, for the barb was not covered in the flesh; but it stirred him to a furious rage, which was all the fiercer because, by a great effort, he had just brought himself to yield to Seraiah's arguments. He tore the arrow from the wound, hurled it at his pursuers with impotent rage, and crying, "All the plagues of Egypt consume you!" disappeared among the rocks.

"You have lost a good recruit," said Seraiah to his comrades when they returned to him.

"What should this son of Belial profit us?" one of the Chasidim haughtily replied. "The Lord grant that my next arrow may be driven better home!"

Seraiah made no answer, but painfully lifting himself from the ground made his way up the pass alone. He did not care for the company of his comrades, and they, on their part, though they could not help respecting him as a soldier, thought him sadly wanting in zeal for the Law and for the traditions of the elders.

Late that night some of the fugitives, who had crossed the mountains somewhat further to the

south, reached Jerusalem. They found the city anxiously expecting tidings of the battle ; and two of their number who were officers were at once brought into the Governor's house. He was indisposed, and Cleon, who had given up his post at Modin and was now attached to head-quarters, saw the new arrivals in his stead. When he had heard their story, he did not conceal his scorn for the mismanagement—or was it cowardice ?—that had made a well-equipped and powerful army flee before a crowd of half-armed vagabonds.

“ It is easy to talk, my fine sir,” retorted one of the men, “ when you have only got to stop at home and find fault ; but if you had seen them to-day, you would be singing to a very different tune. By all the gods above and below, these Jews rushed on more like lions than men. And as to this Judas, son of Asmon, there is no standing against him. No man wants two blows from *his* sword.”

“ A good soldier, I dare say,” said Cleon superciliously, “ and a skilful swordsman. But there are others as good as he. And as for his army, if it is to be called an army, it is quite impossible that it can hold out very long. I was a little hasty in what I said just now. These fanatics have a way of giving some trouble at first, and it is quite possible for really good troops to be beaten by them. But it is quite out of the question to suppose that they can resist any serious attempt to deal with them.

Of course we have made the usual mistake of making too light of them. That must not be done again. The next expedition will be made with overwhelming force, and will unquestionably bring this troublesome matter to an end. I hope to go with it myself."

"That will be as you please, sir," said the officer, who had not by any means recovered his temper after the imputations cast on his courage, "but if I may venture to say so, I would recommend that you should not get in the way of Judas, the son of Asmon."

And, indeed, whatever men like Cleon may have pretended to think, from that time "began the fear of Judas and his brethren and an exceeding great dread to fall upon the nations round about them."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BATTLE OF EMMAUS.

THE effort to wipe out the disgrace of the two defeats and to restore the Greek supremacy was not long delayed; and when it was made, it was made with all the force which the lieutenants of Antiochus could command. The King himself was absent in Persia; but his vicegerent had *carte blanche* for the preparations which they were to make. Lysias, Governor of Syria, had collected forty thousand foot and seven thousand horse, and this force had been put under the command of Nicanor, Gorgias being his principal lieutenant. This time, it was intended, the work should be done thoroughly. This Jewish people, so obstinately troublesome, was to be absolutely extirpated. Not a single native inhabitant was to be left in Palestine, which was to be peopled in future by a more accommodating and manageable race.

This scheme, if it was to be carried out, would

involve huge dealings in human flesh, and the slave-merchants of the sea-coast cities were, naturally, vastly interested in its success. Anxious to do the business as cheaply and effectively as possible, they formed what, in the language of modern commerce, would be called a “Syndicate,” and sent parties of dealers to follow the two armies, and act as their agents when the scheme should begin to come into practical working.

This was the occupation, then, of four repulsive-looking creatures who had obtained permission to follow the army of Nicanor, and whom we may see discussing a flagon of the best Chian wine—the trade was as profitable as it was odious—and canvassing the prospects of business.

“Well,” said one of the four, pursuing the narrative of an interview which he had just been having with Lysias, “we had a long debate about terms. The Governor was quite firm about one thing: there must be no picking and choosing. ‘No,’ he said, ‘either you buy them all, or they shall be put up in the open market.’ ‘But what,’ I said, ‘am I to do with the old and the weak?’ ‘And what am I to do with them?’ he answered. ‘No; you must buy them all or none.’ There I could not move him. He could not be bothered with detail. For so many prisoners, so many talents, half paid down, half six months credit. Old men and women at their last gasp, and new-born babes

were all to be counted in. Those were his terms and I had to accept them, or we should not have come to an agreement."

"That does not seem a good bargain," interrupted another member of the company.

"Wait a moment," said the first speaker, "till you hear the price. I think you will agree that there is no reason to complain. At first he wanted a talent¹ for every fifty. That of course was out of the question on the 'take-all' terms, and I told our friend so quite plainly. 'No,' I said, 'a talent for every hundred is about the right price, and even then we may very well lose,' which, you will allow, was sailing very near the wind indeed. Well, we had a long argument. First he would meet me half way. But I held out. You know they *must* have money. There is Antiochus—the 'Glorious' they call him—gone off to Persia on a wild goose chase after some treasures he has heard of. I'll wager that he'll spend more than he gets by a long way. I have friends at Court, and they tell me that the treasury is as empty as—well, we'll say a wine jar, after our friend Nicias there has had it at his mouth for a minute. So I was firm. And at last—to make a long story short—we came to terms at a talent for ninety. And I can't help thinking that it is not by any means a bad bargain."

¹ The talent must have been a talent of gold, which may be reckoned as equal to £3,300.

“ And what are we to do with the worthless ones ? ” said one of the dealers. “ Surely having to keep them will take all the shine off our profits.”

“ Keeping them ! Who talks about keeping them ? We shall only have to bury them, and that does not cost very much. You have not been long in the trade, my good friend, and you don’t know how soon their food seems to disagree with the poor wretches whom we can’t sell.”

He smiled an evil smile, and the others burst out into a laugh, in which, however, the young man who “ had not been long in the trade ” did not join.

“ And what becomes of all the money ? ” said one of the dealers, who had hitherto taken no part in the conversation.

“ Well, a part will be wanted for present expenses, pay of the troops, stores, and so forth ; and that is to be paid in gold. But the greater part has to go to Rome—the King, you know, owes a great deal on the indemnity account. For that we shall find bills of exchange.”

“ Most of the money, then, is to go to Rome ? ”

“ Yes ; and don’t you see the advantage of the arrangement ? Of course most of it will come back into our pockets. Slaves from this part of the world are quite the fashion in Rome now ; and I am very much mistaken if these Jewish slaves don’t turn out a great success. They are quite a novelty ; I should think that they have hardly been seen in the Roman

markets. And then they have a very distinguished look, and the girls are sometimes remarkably handsome. I don't like to brag—and of course this is all between ourselves—but I think that we shall make a *very* good business indeed out of this campaign."

"If our side wins, that is," said the youngest of the dealers, who was evidently a little discomposed by what he had heard.

"*If*, indeed! There is no 'if' in the matter. You don't suppose this set of ragged beggars can stand against the army of Lysias?"

"Well, they stood against Apollonius, and killed him; and they stood against Seron."

"Yes, but this is another matter altogether. Lysias has got fifty thousand as good troops as there are in the world, barring, of course, the Romans; and they *must* win. And then we shall all make our fortunes as sure as the sun is in the sky."

And, indeed, as viewed from without, the prospects of success which seemed to lie before the forces of Antiochus were very great. The army was powerful—it numbered nearly eight times as many as that of the patriots—it was thoroughly well equipped, and it was led by men who at least had the reputation of being good soldiers.

This time it was judged expedient to avoid the difficult pass of Beth-horon and to advance by the easier road of Emmaüs. At Emmaüs, accordingly,

Nicanor had pitched his camp for the night, intending to move early the next day on Jerusalem, to occupy that city with overwhelming force, and to carry on the operations of the campaign from that base. He was the more hopeful of success because he had received exact information of the position of the patriot general. Benjamin had never forgiven the painful wound which he had received from the arrow of one of the Chasidim after the battle of Beth-horon. The injury had galled him all the more because his feelings had been really touched by the appeals of Seraiah, and he had seriously meditated throwing in his fortunes once more with the cause of his countrymen. He now made his way to the camp of Nicanor, and told him all that he knew of the position of Judas. The Greek general despatched his lieutenant with a picked force to attack him. While the enemy was thus occupied he should be able, he thought, to make the passage of the mountains without hindrance or loss.

Judas was at Mizpeh, in command of a force more numerous than any he had before been able to collect, but still not amounting to more than six thousand men. But the sight that this six thousand saw from the Mizpeh ridge—the watch-tower, as it was called—was such as to rouse to fury the hearts of all who beheld it. For there, lying before them, was the city of their love, the city of David, of Solomon, of Josiah, of Hezekiah, of Ezra, and Nehe-

miah, and they could see, only too plainly in the clear sunset light, the horror of its desolation. The streets were empty; the walls, in old time thronged at evening by crowds of citizens and their families, were deserted; the gates were shut. The Temple could be seen, but its courts were silent and empty. And, rising above, in the City of David, in the very heart of the Jewish kingdom, was the fort of the Greek garrison—the hateful sign of the domination of the heathen. Then followed a touching ceremony, by which the servants of the Lord, banished from the courts of His House, yet sought to show the reverence and the love which they felt for its sacred precincts, for the Holy Place which they could see with their eyes, though they might not tread it with their feet. A numerous company of mourners, chosen to represent the whole people, ranged themselves on the ridge which commanded the prospect so sad and yet so dear. They were clad in garments of black sackcloth, itself ragged and tattered, and had strewn ashes on their heads. They spread out copies of the Law—that Law which the heathen had silenced in its own peculiar seat, and which they had insulted and profaned, picturing on its very pages the cruel and lustful demons whom they worshipped; the functions of the priests had ceased, but they could at least display within sight of the Sanctuary the garments which they wore; the sacrifices could not be offered, but they could at least show the bullocks

and rams, the firstfruits of the cornfield and the vineyard, and present them in heart and will; vows could not be performed, but the Nazarites, with their unshorn locks, could stretch out their hands to the Sanctuary, and dedicate themselves in intention. And then from the whole multitude rose the cry, “What shall we do with these, and whither shall we carry them? For Thy Sanctuary is trodden down and profaned, and Thy priests are in heaviness and brought low. And lo! the heathen are assembled together against us to destroy us; what things they imagine against us, Thou knowest. How shall we be able to stand against them, except Thou, O God, be our help?”

This done, the trumpets sounded, as if to remind the mourners that they were soldiers again, and the whole multitude fell at once into military order. Judas carefully inspected his force. Mindful of the old indulgence given by the Law, he proclaimed that any among his followers who were building a house, or planting a vineyard, or had left behind him at home a newly-married wife, should depart. Those were not days when houses were being built or vineyards planted, for the land, save for some barren mountain ranges, was in the power of the heathen; nor was it a time for marrying or giving in marriage. Scarcely a man out of the whole array claimed the exemption. And when the leader went on, “If any man be timid or of a faint heart, let him turn

back, while there is time," only two or three slunk away.

To those that remained Judas addressed a few stirring words. "You have seen," he said, "the city of your fathers from afar, how it lies desolate and dishonoured. Be bold and quit you like men, and the Lord will deliver it into your hands, for He can deliver both by many and by few. Arm yourselves at dawn, and we will fight with those nations who have defiled our sanctuary and have now come out to destroy us."

But the struggle was to come sooner than any one had looked for it. Azariah had been setting the sentinels who were to watch the northern side of the encampment, when he heard a voice that seemed to have a familiar sound.

"Azariah!" it said, in a penetrating whisper.

"I am here; say on;" and he felt sure that he recognized the voice of Benjamin.

"Tell your captain that Gorgias has come out of the camp of Nicanor with six thousand men, the very choicest of his army, and that he will attack him this night. Farewell!"

And before Azariah could answer he was out of sight and hearing. A quick remorse had overtaken the robber for his treacherous act, and he had done his best to remedy the wrong.

Judas, on hearing the news, lost no time in making his resolve. It was bold, even audacious.

He would not wait to be attacked, but would himself attack, and that not the detachment under Gorgias, which it was quite possible he might have some difficulty in meeting, but the main body itself. Here he would certainly have the advantage of being utterly unexpected. And a victory over this would be almost, if not absolutely, decisive.

Accordingly he left his camp at Mizpeh without attempting to remove any of his belongings. In truth, they were scanty enough, and, if things went well with him, he should secure spoil of a hundred-fold more value than all that he had left. With nothing but their arms, and such scanty provision as they could carry in their pouches, his men marched through the darkness down into the plain.

The day was dawning when he came within sight of the camp of Nicanor. Though not regularly fortified, it was a place of considerable strength, which an army far more numerous and better equipped than that which Judas had under his command might hesitate to attack. The cavalry had bivouacked outside; the infantry were within the lines, but might be seen passing out of the gates.

So formidable a task did it seem to attack a fortified camp, held by a vastly superior force, that even Judas's band of heroes hesitated for a moment. He felt it at once, and at once addressed himself to check it. He called a halt, and bidding the ranks close in to as small a space as possible, he addressed

them, sending his mighty voice in the still air of the morning with so commanding a power that it reached the very extremity of the crowd. In a few stirring words he reminded them of the deliverances which God had wrought in old time for His people. He spoke of the three hundred of Gideon, how they had discomfited the host of the Midianites, of the angel that had smitten with an unseen sword the legions of the haughty Sennacherib. He told them of the day when Macedonian and Jew had stood side by side against the Gallic invaders of Asia, and of how the Jew had stood firm while the Greek had fled before the fury of the barbarian onset. Finally he reminded them of the victories which they themselves had so lately won against overwhelming odds.

When he had finished his harangue, he divided the host between himself and his brothers, John, Simon and Jonathan. Eleazar was to recite the Holy Book, and to give his name as the watchword of the day. These arrangements made, he gave a signal to the trumpeters. They blew a piercing blast. Then, with a shout, "The Help of God! The Help of God!"¹ the patriots charged. It might have seemed to an onlooker the strategy of despair, but it was successful, as it had been many a time in history before, as it has been many a time since.

¹ This is the meaning of the name Eleazar.

The Greeks stared at them, as they advanced, with astonishment. Were these men madmen, or were they fired by some Divine fury? In either case they would be dangerous antagonists. As the patriots drew nearer, without a sign of hesitation or holding back, the terror which had been creeping over the minds of the Greeks became insupportable. They broke and fled, and did not even, so complete was their demoralization, attempt to hold their camp. Though pursuit was shortened by the approach of the Sabbath, which Judas would not suffer to be infringed upon even to complete his victory, more than three thousand fell, and as the Greek line had not waited to receive the onset of the patriots, all of them perished in the flight.

The work was not yet done, for the detachment under Gorgias had still to be accounted for. This, however, gave the conquerors very little trouble. That general had found the camp of Judas empty, and had naturally concluded that its occupants had been frightened away by his approach. He started in pursuit, but without being able to find any clear traces of the route which the supposed fugitives had taken. Probably, he thought, this would be in the direction of the mountain retreat from which they had issued. It was long before he satisfied himself that he was mistaken; but the peasants whom he questioned were evidently truthful when they declared that they had seen nothing of the force

of which he was in search. He had to retrace his steps, and could not do this till he had given his men a rest, wearied as they were with almost incessant marching for a night and a day. It was late in the afternoon before he arrived in sight of the camp of the main body, and by that time Judas's victory had been won. He was astonished and alarmed to see that part of it was on fire. Shortly afterwards a fugitive from the defeated army came in with news of what had happened. Neither Gorgias nor his men were in any humour to encounter the patriots ; they hastily turned and made the best of their way to Jerusalem.

Information of this retreat was soon brought to Judas by his scouts, and he felt that now at last he and his followers might enjoy their victory. The Sabbath was given, as usual, to rest and devotion. A great service was held, a prominent feature of it being the chanting of the great Psalm of Thanksgiving,¹ “O give thanks unto the Lord, for His mercy endureth for ever.” The marvels of creation, the deliverance from Egypt, the passage of the hosts of the Lord through the Red Sea, the fall of the Amorite kings who had sought to stop their way to the Promised Land, the possession of the inheritance which had been promised to the fathers—all these blessings were enumerated, and after each new theme, given by the clear voices of the singers, rose

¹ Psalm cxxxvi.

the thunderous chorus of reply from the multitude,
“ For His mercy endureth for ever.”

On the first day of the week the spoils were divided. The division was made with scrupulous fairness, and with a reverent regard to the injunctions of the Law. The wounded received a special consideration for their sufferings; a share was reserved for the widows and orphans of the slain; and those to whom had been given the unwelcome duty of staying behind to guard the encampment were not forgotten. The rich furniture of the officers' tents, the gold and silver plate, the many-coloured silks, and robes of Tyrian purple, with a well-furnished pay-chest, made together a splendid booty.

Among the prisoners was the party of slave-dealers to whom our readers were introduced at the beginning of this chapter.

“ Who are you ? ” cried Judas, when they were brought before him, “ and what do you here ? ”

“ We are merchants,” said their spokesman, “ brought by business into the camp of his Excellency Nicanor.”

“ And in what merchandize do you deal ? ” asked Judas, though, as may be supposed, he was perfectly well acquainted with their occupation.

“ We deal in the prisoners of war,” answered the man. “ Permit me, sir,” he went on, “ to congratulate your Excellency on the splendid victory

that you have won, and to beg the favour of your custom. We offer the best of prices for goods, and pay in ready money or in bills on the best houses, quite as safe as cash, I can assure you, and far more convenient to carry."

"Do you know this document?" asked Judas, holding up a piece of parchment which had been found among the property of the slave-dealers.

The man turned pale and said nothing.

Judas then proceeded to read aloud: "It is hereby covenanted between the most excellent Lysias, Governor of Syria, on the first part, and Theron and his Company, dealers in slaves, on the second part, that the said Lysias shall hand over, and that the said Theron and his Company shall take all persons that shall be captured in the operations now about to be begun by the army of the said Lysias. And it is further covenanted that the said Theron and Company shall pay to the said Lysias or such other persons as he shall appoint, the sum of one talent of gold for every ninety persons delivered alive into the hands of the said Theron and Company. Furthermore it is agreed that the said Theron and Company shall have no claim for a drawback for any such persons dying after they have been once delivered; but that a drawback shall be allowed at the rate of six *minæ*¹ for every person, who, as being a loyal subject of our lord and king Antiochus, or of

¹ About £24.

any prince in friendship and alliance with him, shall have been wrongfully taken prisoner."

"Know you this document?"

Theron stammered an assent. "It is but a common matter of business, my lord. Such covenants must be drawn up, and, doubtless, they sound somewhat harsh."

"Ye have digged a pit, and are fallen into the midst of it yourselves," said Judas, in a voice of thunder. "Let them be taken with the followers of the camp to the slave-market of Sidon."

"Mercy, my lord!" cried the dealers, falling on their knees.

"Such mercy as you have shown yourselves you shall have, and no more. Lead them away."

"Nay, my lord," cried Theron, struggling away from the soldier who had grasped him by the arms, "you do ill to deal so harshly with men that have not borne arms against you."

"You have done tenfold worse," was the answer. "I know your works. You sell our youths to the mines, where the young man grows old and decrepit before he has reached to middle age, and the maidens you sell to shame; and the old and sick you slay with the sword or poison. Take them away."

"Listen once more, my lord," cried the man, in an agony of despair. "We have money; not here, of course, but with those whom we represent; if

you should want a loan, we can find it for your Excellency, and at low interest, lower than you will find elsewhere."

"Take them away!" thundered Judas.

And taken away they were, still screaming out, as they were dragged off, offers of ransom, or loans at five per cent. interest, or no interest at all.

The next day Judas and his army, richly laden with spoils of every kind, returned to the sanctuary among the hills.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE BATTLE OF BETH-ZUR.

SEVERAL months have passed since the scenes described in the last chapter. During the winter Judas has been increasing and consolidating his army, and he has now a force both more numerous and better equipped than any that he had hitherto commanded. Again he has marched to encounter the Greeks, but he has no easy task before him. Lysias in person commands the Syrian army. Antiochus has sent him some veteran troops from the capital; he has raised fresh levies of his own, and he has enrolled in his ranks the remnants of the armies of Seron and Nicanor. Altogether he has collected an army of sixty thousand men, and must out-number his antagonists at least five times. The struggle will be of a critical kind, and the victory, if won at all, can hardly be won without grievous loss. The Greeks are fighting for their last stake. If they lose this they are disgraced.

The experience of a soldier's wife had not lessened

the anxiety with which Ruth waited for news of the battle. This time all that were especially near and dear to her had gone with the army—her husband, her brother, and Azariah—all had run or were even then running deadly peril of their lives. When the news came it might find her utterly desolate, a widow indeed.

During the night these terrors had had almost undisputed sway. It seemed impossible to her to recall the holy words which at other times brought comfort to her soul. Some dreadful picture of her dear ones lying cold and stark upon the battle-field would rise up before her eyes; and again and again the hideous laughing of the hyenas, echoed among the hills, seemed to her like the mocking triumph of the heathen.

The light of morning brought, as it is wont to bring, if not cheerfulness, at least a more hopeful spirit. Anyhow she had not to lie in forced inaction. The daily duties had to be done; and she could find in them not forgetfulness, indeed, but the wholesome invigorating influence of work. Her first task was to fetch the daily ration of food. Miriam and Judith accompanied her, and her little boy was now old enough to toddle by her side. The girls had already begun to bear the burdens of a woman's cares, but the child was in happy unconsciousness of trouble, and there was a certain infection of cheerfulness in his laughter and prattle.

Ruth's way to the store where the rations were distributed led past the point from which the best view of the pass could be obtained. She scanned the prospect eagerly as she went, but could see nothing. On her return she espied the figure of a man who seemed—for he was still almost too distant to be distinguished—to be approaching.

“Look, girl,” she cried, “surely some one comes yonder, and he must be bringing tidings of the battle. Oh! if they are safe——”

As she spoke she dropped the piece of flesh, which she was carrying, from her hand; and immediately a vulture swooped down and carried it off.

The watchman had now descried the figure of the traveller, and made the signal which was to indicate to the inmates of the encampment the fact that tidings from the army was at hand. In an instant all that were able to move had poured out, and were hurrying to the top of the pass.

The messenger was Micah, whom, as one of the fleetest runners in the army, Judas had selected to carry the news of his victory. He had traversed the distance, which could not have been less than thirty miles, at a pace which had sorely tried even his athletic frame. He flung himself on the ground, panting convulsively for breath, and unable to speak. One of the elders poured a few drops of cordial into his mouth, and by degrees he recovered his powers. His first act was to kneel and with outspread hands

to thank the Lord of Hosts. “We thank thee, God of our fathers, that thou hast delivered us out of the hand of the enemy, and brought us unto the haven where we would be.” Then, amidst the breathless attention of the listening crowd, he told the story.

“Judas the Hammer,” and as he said the name a murmur of blessing could be heard from the whole assembly—“Judas, the Hammer of God, has smitten the enemy to pieces. Two days since he met Lysias—for the Governor himself was in command—at Beth-zur. There by that valley of Elah, where David slew Goliah of Gath, has the Lord God of Israel proved again that the battle is not to the strong nor the race to the swift. Judas himself led the right wing; the left he had given to Seraiah and Azariah, whom I myself had the privilege of following. The lines of the two armies were about equal in length; nor, indeed, was there room on either side for more; but they had their ranks forty deep and more, and we but seven or eight at the most, for they were many times more numerous. But the Lord showed once again that He can deliver as surely by few as many. Our captain, than whom no man has a more generous temper, though he would gladly have been the first to advance against the enemy, granted that privilege to us. Then we shouted, as we did in the day of Emmaüs, “The Lord is our Help!” and ran forward. While we were yet halt a furlong from them, we saw them tremble

and waver; and before we could cross our swords with them their line had broken. That done, their numbers availed them no more, but rather hindered them, so crowded and crushed together were they. We slew till we were weary of slaying."

"And what befell Lysias, the Governor?" asked one of the elders.

"He had posted himself over against Judas himself, judging that there would be the most need of his presence. And indeed they say—for I myself did not see him, being, as I have said, on the other side of the field—that he bore himself as a brave soldier and a good captain. And Judas, when he saw him, pressed forward, seeking to meet him face to face. But Lysias was struck with terror and fled. He had not the heart to abide a stroke from the Hammer. He escaped with some hundred horsemen of his bodyguard from the field. The prisoners say that he is gone to Antioch to gather another army. Let him gather it. We will deal with it and him as we have dealt hitherto with the enemies of the Lord."

"And what does Judas now?" asked the elder.

With a look of joy and triumph Micah lifted his head and said, "He is in Jerusalem. The Lord has given back into our hands the Holy City, the City of David His servant."

It is impossible to describe the delight with which this announcement was received. The women, even

the men, wept for joy. This was indeed a glorious gain of victory. Last year they could only see the Holy City from afar, and weep over its desolation. Now they could pour out their love and their sorrow within its sacred precincts.

“Yes,” he repeated, “Judas is in Jerusalem, and is making ready to purify the Temple. And you are to return as speedily as you can. The days of your exile are over. Our God has recalled His banished unto Him.”

His public mission finished, Micah could give time to private affection. He went with Ruth and the children to their cave, and then, after sharing their morning meal, told them all they wanted to hear. Seraiah and Azariah were both safe, though both had had narrow escapes, Azariah’s helmet having been broken in by a sword-stroke from a gigantic Gaul, and Seraiah being saved by a little roll of the Prophecy of Daniel, which he always carried about with him—it was a gift from his wife—and which had stopped the point of a javelin that would otherwise have pierced his heart. Ruth and the children were never satisfied with asking questions and listening to his answers. Even the little Daniel seemed to understand something of what was being said, as he listened, with his baby-eyes wide open, to the talk of his elders.

“And Cleon,” asked Ruth, “the Greek with whom you used to be so friendly in time past—did

you see him? You met him, you told us, in Modin, and parted in anger; did you meet him again?"

A cloud seemed to pass over Micah's face at this question, and for a few moments he was silent.

"Ah! Ruth," he said, "the Lord be merciful to him, as He has been merciful to me! And did I not sin against Him tenfold more grievously than any heathen could have sinned? For was I not a child of the Covenant, and had I not light and knowledge, whereas he was born in ignorance and knew not of the mercies and deliverances which I knew, and knowing despised."

"Is he a prisoner, then?" asked Miriam, "and will Judas spare him?"

"He needs no mercy from man, my child," said Micah, solemnly. "In the battle I did not meet him. That was well. I should have been loath to cross swords with him; and yet I could hardly have failed to do so. But in the evening, when Lysias had fled eastward with the remnants of his host, and the victory was won, I saw him on the field of battle. The captain himself was with me, as we went among the wounded and the dead, looking for any to whom we could give such help as they needed. He had been pierced with a ghastly wound through the breast. And when Judas saw him, he said to me, 'Ah! that is a brave soldier, and as good a swordsman as ever I met. I had a hard bout with him this morning, and had he not slipped in making

a blow, it might have gone ill with me. Do you know him?' 'Yes,' I said, 'in the old time, when I mingled with the heathen and walked in their ways.' 'See, then, whether you can help him in any way; I love a brave man, be he heathen or no.' I was willing enough to do anything that I could for him, you may be sure; one glance at that pale face was enough to chase away all the anger with which we had parted. 'Cleon!' I said. And he knew me and smiled—a very wan and feeble smile, but still a smile. Then I tried to stanch the blood that was flowing from his wound. 'Nay,' said he, "'tis idle; I am past all help; let it flow, and I shall be sooner out of my pain. But, dear Menander—nay, pardon me, I should call you Micah—give me some water to drink, for I have a raging thirst.' I had a leathern bottle of water, and gave him a draught. Then I rested his head upon my shoulder, and bathed his forehead with the water. Judas meanwhile had gone further, and I saw a party of the Chasidim ranging the field, and I thought that they could scarcely pass us by without seeing us, so I said to Cleon, 'Let me lay you down till these are past; for if they know you as a friend of Jason they will not spare your life. 'Tis better to feign death than to meet it at their hands.' Then he smiled and said, 'No need, Micah, to feign death. Your Hammer has smitten me down, and I shall not need another stroke.' And almost as he spoke the



Farewell to the Mountains.

words, he died. And just then the captain came back, and we buried him where he had fallen. The Lord have mercy on him!"

"But will He have mercy on the heathen?" said Miriam, who had begun to think.

"Nay, child—who knows?" answered Micah. "Surely some of us need His pardon more than they, who have not known Him, nor have been called by His name."

The next day Micah returned, in obedience to orders, and two or three days afterwards all the party that had been left in the mountains followed him to Jerusalem. It was a happy day, but saddened, for the children at least, by one loss. The jackal, Jael, followed the party awhile, but when they reached the plain, stood still and watched them disappear, making mournful cries the while. Even the prospect of seeing their old home could not quite reconcile the children to the loss of this strange playmate, who had yet grown so dear to them.

And so the rugged mountains which had afforded a refuge to the faithful remnant were left again to silence and solitude. But the memory of what the confessors and martyrs had endured in the evil days was never to perish. Generation after generation remembered with sympathy and reverence what men, aye, and weak women and children had borne for conscience' sake—cold and hunger and nakedness, and that anguish of soul which is harder to

be endured than all bodily pain. Two centuries later, an inspired Hebrew, writing to Hebrews, commemorated the noble endurance of this faithful band in his famous roll of the triumphs of faith : “They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented, of whom the world was not worthy; they wandered in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.”¹

¹ Hebrews xi. 37-38. Compare ii. Macc. x. vi. “When as they wandered in the mountains and dens like beasts.”

CHAPTER XIX.

IN JERUSALEM.

AMONG those who watched the approach of Judas and his host to Jerusalem were two men, one in extreme old age, the other numbering, it would seem, about fifty years. They wore the priestly garments, old indeed and threadbare, but still clean and showing many signs of careful repair. Theirs was a strange history. For two years they had been in hiding in the city. When Apollonius had filled the streets of Jerusalem with blood, the murderers had sought with especial care for all priests and Levites. To them at least no mercy was to be shown. These two men—Shemaiah was the name of the elder of the two, and Joel that of the younger—had narrowly escaped death from the soldiers of Apollonius. They had taken refuge—so close was the pursuit—in a garden, the gate of which happened to be open, and had hidden themselves in the bushes till nightfall. Where they were, who or of what

race was the owner of the house, whether they were likely to meet with more mercy from his hands than they could expect from the soldiers, they knew not. But that hiding-place was their only chance, and in their desperate strait they snatched at it. While they were debating in whispers whether they should throw themselves on the compassion of this unknown person, they saw—for it was a moonlight night—the figure of a woman walking down a path which passed close by their hiding-place. They could see from her features, which the brilliant moonlight of the East lighted up, that she was a countrywoman of their own, and they resolved to appeal to her for protection. Shemaiah, whose age and venerable appearance would, they judged, be less likely to alarm, threw himself on the ground at her feet. She started back in astonishment.

“Lady,” he said, “I see that you are a daughter of Abraham. Can you help two servants of the Lord that have so far escaped from the sword of the Greeks?”

She was reassured by a nearer view of the speaker. “Who are you?” she said. “Speak without fear, for there is no one to harm you.”

Shemaiah told his story.

“And your companion,” said Eglah—for that was the woman’s name—“where is he?”

The old man called to Joel, who came forth at his bidding from his hiding-place.

Eglah stood for a few minutes buried in thought. Then she spoke.

“As I hope that the Lord will have mercy on me and pardon my sin, so will I help you even to the giving up of my life. But I am not worthy that you should come under my roof. Now listen to my story. When Antiochus—the Lord reward him for the evil that he has done to His people!—came to this city, I was seized and sold for a slave. And a certain Greek soldier, Glaucus by name, the captain of a company, bought me in the market. He had compassion on me, and dealt honourably with me, and made me his wife after the fashion of his people. And I consented to live with him, though I knew that it was a sin for a daughter of Abraham to be wife unto a man that was a heathen. But alas! sirs, what was I to do? for I was a weak woman, and there was no one to help me. Should I have slain him in his sleep, as Judith slew Holofernes? Once I thought to do so, and I took a dagger in my hand, but when I saw him I repented. Whether it was fear or love that turned me I know not. That I was afraid I know, for the very sight of the steel made me tremble. And I must confess that I loved him also, for he had been very kind and gentle with me; and there is not a goodlier man to look at in all Jerusalem.”

“Be comforted, my daughter,” said Shemaiah, whose years had taught him a tolerance to which

his younger companion had, perhaps, scarcely attained. "'Tis at least no sin for a wife to love her husband."

"Then you do not think me so wicked as to be beyond all hope?" cried poor Eglah, eagerly.

"Nay, my daughter," said the old man; "you were in a sore strait, and all women are not as Judith was."

"Then you will not refuse to come into my house? I have a large cellar where you can lie hid. 'Tis under the ground, indeed, but airy and dry, and you can make shift to live there. And I will feed you as best I may. My husband has an open hand, and never makes any question as to the money that I spend upon the house, and he will not know what I have done. I judge it best to keep the thing from him, not because I fear that he would betray you—for he is an honourable man and kindly, but it would go hard with him, being an officer in the army of the King, if it should be discovered that he knew it."

And so for two years Shemaiah and Joel had inhabited the cellar in Eglah's house. Glaucus, the husband, was just the kindly, generous man whom his wife had described. Once or twice he had terrified her by some joking remark about the rapidity with which the provision purchased for the house disappeared. "When we dine together, my darling," he said, on one occasion, "you eat what would be scarce enough for a well-favoured fly;

but I am glad to think that you are hungry at other times." "O husband," she said, "there are many poor of my own people, and I cannot deny them." She hoped as she said it that the falsehood would not be counted as another sin against her. "Nay, nay, darling," said the good-natured man. "Give as much as thou wilt. Thank the gods and his Highness the King I have enough and to spare."

Glaucus, though allowed to live in his own house, had, of course, to spend much time upon his military duties, and was, consequently, often away. During his absence Eglah could bring out the two prisoners from their underground lodging, and allow them to enjoy the fresh air of the garden, which, happily, was not overlooked. She gave them the best food that her means would procure, and at the same time took pains, as has been said, to keep their garments scrupulously clean and neat. On the whole they passed the time of their captivity in tolerable comfort, and without much injury to their health. Latterly they had been cheered by the tidings, always given to them at the very earliest opportunity by their hostess, of the successes of Judas. Within the last few days Glaucus had told his wife that a decisive battle was expected, that it would probably be fought at Beth-zur, and that if her countrymen won it, there was nothing that could hinder them from taking possession of Jerusalem.

Glaucus, who held a command in the garrison of the fort, had not been with Lysias at Beth-zur, but he had heard late on the evening of the day of the result of the battle and had, of course, told it to his wife, and she in turn had communicated it to her inmates. They had been scarcely able to sleep for joy, and had eagerly waited for news of the conqueror's approach. Evening was come, and Eglah had not paid them the accustomed visit. The house was curiously silent; all day not a sound of voices or steps had reached their ears. And now the suspense had become unbearable. "Go forth," said Shemaiah to his younger companion, "go forth, and bring me word again." Joel crept out of his retreat. The streets were deserted; but the fortress was crowded. The garrison stood thickly clustered on the walls, and with them were many inhabitants of the city. It was easy to guess that what Glaucus had foretold had happened. Judas was on his way to take possession of Jerusalem, and all who had compromised themselves by resisting him, had either fled from the place altogether or had taken refuge in the fort. He returned to Shemaiah with a description of what he had seen, and the two at once hastened down to the walls to greet the deliverers.

The sun was near its setting when they entered the city. Without turning to the right or left, though many must have been consumed with

anxiety to hear the fate of kinsmen and friends, they marched to Mount Sion. It was an hour of triumph, the fruition of hopes passionately cherished through many a dark day of sorrow. To stand once more in the place which God had chosen to set His name there, how glorious. But it had its bitterness, as such hours will have, for it was a miserable sight that greeted them. Nothing, indeed, had been done of which they had not heard. There was nothing that they might not have expected or foreseen. Yet the actual view of the holy place in its dismal forlornness overpowered them. It was as if the sight had come upon them by surprise. "When they saw the Sanctuary desolate and the altar profaned, and the gates burnt with fire, and shrubs growing in the courts as in a forest or one of the mountains, and the chambers of the priests pulled down, they rent their clothes, and made great lamentations, and cast ashes upon their heads, and fell down flat to the ground upon their faces."

To repair this ruin, to put an end to this desolation, to purify the place which had been so shamefully polluted, was the first duty of the deliverers. But that the work might be done in peace it was necessary that the fortress of Acra, to use military language, should be masked. A strong force was told off to perform this duty; the rest would lend their aid to the great work of purification.

CHAPTER XX.

THE CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE.

AZARIAH and Micah had been put under John, the eldest of the five brothers, in command of the force employed to blockade the garrison of Acra. The night had passed quietly; the garrison had not attempted a sortie, and had not even harassed the besiegers with a discharge of missiles. And when the morning came they seemed inclined to continue the same inaction. From the high ground the two Jews looked down upon the Temple courts and saw the priests directing a crowd of eager helpers in the work of cleansing the Sanctuary, and labouring diligently with their own hands. The first task was to pull down the idol altar which had been erected on the altar of burnt-offering. This was done in a fury of haste. The hands of the workmen could not, it seemed, move fast enough in destroying the abominable thing. The stones were carried out of the temple with gestures of loathing and disgust,

and afterwards taken to the Valley of Hinnom—unholy things to be cast away in an unholy place.

But the stones of the holy altar itself had been polluted by the superstructure that had been erected upon them. What was to be done with them? At least it was manifest that they could not stand where they were. Sacrifice could not be offered upon them. They were reverently detached from the cement which bound them together, and then borne one by one to a chamber of the Temple, where they were to be laid up till a prophet should arise who should show what was to be done with them. The first duty of dealing with the altar completed, came the work of cleansing and repairing the courts and chambers. The long, trailing creepers were pulled down; the weeds and shrubs were rooted out. The place was still a ruin, but the manifest signs of its desolation and abandonment were removed. So numerous and so eager were the labourers that for this part of the work a few hours sufficed. The task of reparation would, of necessity, be longer and more tedious.

Azariah and Micah had been watching the work with perhaps a more absorbing interest than was quite consistent with their duty of watching the garrison, when suddenly one of the sentries blew an alarm. Scarcely had it sounded when a flight of arrows from the garrison of the fortress fell among the besiegers. The Greeks had watched

their opportunity, and when almost all eyes were turned on the work that was going on below, had sent a volley among the ranks of the enemy.

This sudden attack did no little damage. One or two of the patriots were killed on the spot, several were seriously wounded ; the others either covered themselves with their shields, a precaution which they ought not to have neglected, or sought refuge among the ruins.

Azariah, though he had been caught a little off his guard, was not unprepared to deal with a manifestation of this kind. He had organized a company of slingers, and he now ordered them to advance and clear the wall of its defenders. They knelt with one knee upon the ground, and covered themselves with their shields. Under this shelter they loaded their slings. Then, rising rapidly at a preconcerted signal from their commander, they sent a simultaneous and well-directed shower of leaden bullets on the defenders of the wall. These missiles, sent with a skill and a strength in which the Jewish slingers were unsurpassed, had a marvellous effect. In a moment the wall was cleared, except that here and there along its length the dead and wounded might be seen. The survivors did not venture forth from shelter to carry them away. A fierce conflict followed. From the loopholes of the towers and from behind the battlements the Greek archers kept up the discharge of their arrows, and the Jewish

slingers replied. No great damage was done on either side ; but every now and then a skilful aim at some exposed body or limb was followed by a cry of pain from the wounded man, and the cry was taken up by a shout of triumph from the hostile force. In the course of the afternoon a storm came on, with thunder and lightning and a deluge of rain. Before it had cleared away the light had failed, and hostilities had perforce to be suspended.

About the beginning of the second watch¹ Micah, who was making a round of the sentries, heard the sound of something that seemed to fall heavily upon the soft and splashy ground. The rain had ceased, and the sky had partially cleared ; for a few minutes all was still ; then Micah could hear a sighing which was not the sighing of the wind. He followed the guidance of the sound, and found a woman lying almost insensible upon the ground. He called one of the sentinels to help him, and together they carried her under shelter, and brought torches, by the light of which they might examine her injuries. That she was stunned by the fall was evident, for she did not speak, and when they attempted to move her she groaned with the pain. When left alone she did not seem to suffer much, and they judged it best to wait for the morning, administering meanwhile a little wine and water from time to time.

¹ Nine o'clock, p.m.

The next morning four of the soldiers were told off to remove her on a litter that had been constructed for the use of the wounded to a deserted house in the Lower City—and of deserted houses there was only too great a choice. As the bearers put down their burden on the way to take a brief rest a strange figure came up to the party. It was a woman, young and still showing the remains of beauty, but with a miserably haggard look. It was easy to see from her uncertain gait and wandering eye that she was a lunatic.

Huldah had been for some time a well-known figure in Jerusalem, and her story was of the saddest. She had been a servant in the house of Seraiah, and had been Ruth's own waiting-maid. Returning home from some errand on which she had been sent one day at the beginning of Apollonius's reign of terror, she had been seized by the attendants of the newly-dedicated Temple of Jupiter, and made a slave. Before many weeks had passed the cruel outrages to which she was subjected overthrew her reason. Thus become a trouble to her captors she was permitted to escape. Since then she had been accustomed to wander about the city. The horrors of the past still haunted her, and the recollection of the abominable idolatries in which she had been forced to serve. At every pool of water and fountain she would stay and wash. From every passer-by she would beg for something that might

serve for her cleansing: it was the one craving of her soul to be rid of its defilement. For food or money she never asked; but a few kindly souls in the city gave her enough to support life, and sometimes would renew the garments, threadbare, but always scrupulously neat and clean, which she wore. Of these friends the kindest was Eglah, who had a fellow-feeling for the sufferer, and who was always on the watch to atone by her charitable deeds for what she believed to be the great offence of her life.

Huldah cast a glance at the litter in passing, and at once recognized in the suffering woman her own benefactress. For indeed it was Eglah whom Micah had found under the fortress wall. The recognition made a marvellous change in the poor maniac. It turned her thoughts in another direction. She ceased to dwell upon her own sufferings, and, for the time at least, reason regained its sway.

She knelt down by the side of the litter, and kissed one of the hands that hung listlessly down. Then, rising to her feet, she arranged the cushion on which Eglah lay so as to make it more comfortable. That done, she bade the bearers take up their burden, made a gesture of dissent when they were turning aside to the house to which they had been directed, and led the way to Eglah's own dwelling.

The unhappy creature was positively transformed by the charge which had thus been laid upon her. The most intelligent and thoughtful nurse could not

have done better for her patient than did the poor distracted Huldah. A physician who was called in examined Eglah, and found that though she had been sadly bruised and shaken, no bones were broken. Whether any internal injury existed was more than he could positively say; that time alone would show. Meanwhile careful attention was all that could be done for her, and attention more careful than Huldah's it would be impossible to imagine.

The two priests who had found shelter in Eglah's house were naturally among those whom Judas had summoned to take part in the cleansing of the Temple when he made proclamation for all such as, being of the House of Aaron, were "of blameless conversation and had pleasure in the Law." Posts of special dignity were, indeed, conferred upon them, for both were men of high reputation for sanctity and learning, which was not a little increased by the romantic story of their long seclusion and marvellous escape. Judas assigned them quarters near to his own, and was accustomed to have frequent recourse to their advice. They thus found themselves almost constantly employed, and were unable for several days to find an opportunity of inquiring what had happened to their protectress.

When at last they found their way to the house Eglah had sufficiently recovered her strength to be able to rise from her bed. She was sitting, busy with her needle. Huldah was watching her with

an intense look of affection that was infinitely pathetic.

The poor woman told her story with a voice that again and again was broken with sobs.

“When I was preparing your morning meal in the kitchen my husband, whom I had never before known to set foot in the place, suddenly appeared. I was greatly terrified lest he should ask for whom I was getting the food ready, but he was too much occupied with other things to notice it at all. ‘Eglah,’ he said, ‘you must come with me into the fort. Judas the Hammer has broken our army to pieces. Lysias has fled before him, no one knows whither, and within a few hours he will be in the city. I would have you here, for the fort is scarcely a place for a woman, but I fear your people. Happily they may slay you as having been yoked to a heathen. My darling,’ he went on—and here poor Eglah’s voice was choked with tears—‘I have done ill for you, I fear; but I meant it for the best. And now, I fear, you must cast in your lot with me. May the God whom you serve turn it for good.’ So I gathered a few things together, and went with him. I thought many times that we should scarcely have reached the fort alive, for the people cursed us as we went, the women especially casting many bitter words at me as one that had left her people to join herself to the heathen. But my husband had some six or seven soldiers with him; and they were brave men and

well armed. We had not been many hours in the fort before there began a battle between the garrison and the soldiers of Judas. One of my husband's men, who had gone in a spirit of folly and vanity to show his courage, was struck down with a stone, and my husband ran forth to drag him in. And just as he was returning, another stone from the slingers struck him on the back of his head. It was about the ninth hour of the day when he was wounded, and he lived till the beginning of the second watch, but he never spoke again."

Here the poor creature's story became confused and broken, and her listeners could only guess what had followed. The tale of what followed must be told for her. "'Ah!' said one of the soldiers, 'Glaucus has it. He will never move again, I reckon. A good fellow, but overstrict.' 'But how about the Jewish girl whom he calls his wife?' said the other; 'I shall take her.' 'Nay, nay; let there be fair play between us, comrade, as there has always been. Why you more than I?' 'Because I was the first to speak.' 'Not so; 'twas I that first spoke of her.' 'Well, we won't quarrel, comrade. No woman is good enough to separate old friends. Let us cast the dice for her, and the man that wins shall stand treat for a flagon of wine.' And then Eglah heard them cast the dice, and count the numbers—they would have twenty throws a-piece, they said—and curse and swear when they

threw low. And when they had finished their dice-throwing they came in to see how Glaucus fared; and just as they entered the chamber, he drew a long breath and died. One of them put his hand upon his heart and said, ‘‘Tis all over with him; he will never toss a flagon or kiss a pretty girl again.’’ And then he laid his hand upon Eglah’s shoulder, and said, ‘Cheer up; we will find another husband for thee as good as he.’ But the first said, ‘Nay, Timon, leave her alone. The women are not like us. You must give them a few hours to cry.’ ‘Well, well,’ said his comrade, ‘you were always soft-hearted. Let us come and have our flagon; there is no reason why we should wait for that.’’ The comrades went on their errand and left the widow alone with her dead husband. She kissed him, and cut off a little curl of his hair, and then went forth on the wall—for the chamber in which he lay was in one of the wall-towers—and threw herself down to the ground. It was better, she thought, to die than to sin again.

“Daughter,” said Joel, “you should thank the Lord that, without your own doing, the tie that bound you to this heathen man is broken.”

“O sir,” broke out the poor woman, “do not say so. I cannot find it in my heart to thank Him, though I do try to say in my heart, ‘Thy will be done.’”

“Brother,” said the old Shemaiah, “you are too hard upon her. ‘Tis right that a wife should mourn

for her husband, be he Jew or Greek. Before the Lord, I had thought ill of her had she been of the temper that you would have her."

Eglah turned to the old man a grateful look. "O sir," she said, "you do not know how kind and good my Giaucus was. I never had an angry word from him. Nor did he ever hinder me from my prayers. Rather he would say when I went three times to my chamber to pray, 'Speak a word for me, wife, if you will.' And he would oftentimes speak to me about my God, and say that he liked Him better than the gods in whom *he* had been taught to believe. And I used to tell him stories out of the Book, and how the Lord had delivered his people out of the land of Egypt, and had brought them into the land which He sware to Abraham to give him. And he never mocked or laughed, but listened with all his heart. And, sir, I do sometimes think that if he had been spared to live longer, he would have become one of us. But he is dead, and I shall never, never see him any more."

And the poor desolate widow burst out into a passion of tears, and threw herself prostrate on the couch, Huldah trying to comfort her, not with words—which, indeed, she could not command, and which, in any case, would have been of small avail—but with great demonstrations of love.

After a while Eglah looked up, and turning to Shemaiah, in whose sympathy and charity she

trusted, said, "O, sir, do you think that there is any hope for him? Must he go into that dreadful Gehenna? For indeed he was kind and good, and never thought of any woman but his wife, and never injured one of our people, but would help them and defend them when his fellows were rough with them. He was better than many Jews that I know. Is it not possible that God may have mercy upon him?"

Joel was about to speak, but Shemaiah beckoned to him to hold his peace. "My daughter," he said, "these things are too deep for us; but I would say, be of good hope for him that is gone, seeing that he was such as you say. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? To some He giveth much light, and to some but little; and He judgeth each according to that which He has given. Therefore I bid you be of good cheer."

"And may I pray for him?" asked Eglah.

"Surely you may, for no prayer, so that it come out of an honest heart and pure lips, but finds some fulfilment."¹

He rose and, giving her his blessing, departed, followed by Joel, whose narrow intelligence was not a little startled by what his old companion had said.

¹ There seems to have been a belief among the Jews of this time in the efficacy of prayers for the dead. So we read in 2 Maccabees xii. 45: "Whereupon he made a reconciliation for the dead that they might be delivered from sin." This is probably the chief reason why the Council of Trent included the Books of Maccabees and other Apocryphal writings in the Canon of Scripture.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE DEDICATION OF THE TEMPLE.

JERUSALEM now began to assume an aspect very different from that which it had borne for some years past. Thousands, who had been driven away by the terrors of the evil days, now hastened to return. Many of the lower class, constrained by the necessity of poverty, had always remained, enduring persecution as best they could, and often, of course, escaping it by their obscurity. Now the wealthier inhabitants began to flock back from their hiding-places in the country and from foreign lands; the streets again began to be busy; the shopkeepers displayed the wares which there had been no one to purchase, or which they had been afraid to show; the long-shut markets were reopened and thronged with purchasers.

The priests alone, gathered as they were from their abodes scattered throughout Palestine, made a considerable addition to the population of the

city. They were a numerous class, far beyond any requirements of their sacrificial duties, and commonly remained at home, awaiting the rarely recurring occasion of services that called them to Jerusalem. But now a work was before them in which all could take part, for the Temple, having been cleansed and having received such repair as could be done at once, was to be dedicated afresh.

The first necessary work was the construction of a new altar of sacrifice. This work was to be of the primitive kind, in strict conformity to the Law, and as unlike as possible to the elaborate erections of the alien worship, and it was to be done, from first to last, by the consecrated hands of the priests. They dug out of the earth of the valley rough stones. No tool of iron was to be used in raising them from their place; none was to be employed in hewing them into shape. It was the priests again who solemnly conveyed them into the Great Court of the Temple, who joined them together with mortar, and covered them with whitewash. Meanwhile other preparations for a wholly renovated service were being busily carried on. Most of the furniture of the Temple had been carried off by a succession of plunderers; if any of the less valuable and less easily removed articles had been left these had suffered an irremediable defilement. Everything therefore had to be replaced; and workmen were now busily employed

in this work. The altar of incense, the candlestick with its seven branches, the table on which the loaves of the shew-bread were to be placed, the mercy-seat with the overshadowing cherubim that was the chief feature of the Holy of Holies, and the various curtains that were needed for the separation of the various parts of the building, were manufactured with all possible haste, some of the articles, from lack of time and materials, being intended to serve their purpose only till they could be more worthily replaced. Generally, however, it was time rather than means that was wanting, for in the late campaigns treasure almost enough to replace the spoliations of years had been taken from the Greeks, and this, after being duly purified and blessed, could be devoted to holy uses.

And so came on the day that had been appointed for the Feast of Dedication. It was to be the 25th of the month Chislev.¹ It was a memorable day, both for good and evil, in the annals of Jewish worship. On this day, ages before, Jerusalem, the newly-won capital of the nation, had been finally chosen as the place where God should set His name; for on this day David, as he made atonement in the day of pestilence, bought the threshing-floor of Araunah the Jebusite to be the future dwelling-place of the Presence of the Lord God of Israel. And on this day, again, five years ago, the first

¹ The month Chislev about corresponds to our December.

idol sacrifice had been offered within the consecrated precincts.

In the early morning, before the sun had risen upon the earth, a spark was obtained by striking stone against stone, the fire was rekindled on the altar, the golden candlestick was lighted and the table of the shew-bread duly furnished with its twelve loaves.

Meanwhile the rest of the people also had been busy in making preparations for the great celebration. Every family, even the poorest, was to keep festival on the day that was to be a new beginning of the national life. The women and children were early afoot, gathering branches of palms and other "goodly trees"; none of them having busier hands than Ruth and her nieces. Even the little Daniel would take his part in the work, tottering along by his mother's side with his arms full of boughs. When they had gathered as great a burden as they could carry, Ruth gathered her little company about her, and told them, just as the rising sun began to flood the valley with its slanting rays, the story of the day—of the glory and the shame which it had brought to Israel.

And now, as the time of the morning sacrifice drew near, the whole people moved in one great stream towards the Temple, and the Great Court was crowded. On the walls of the fortress the heathen soldiers of the garrison stood in throngs watching the solemnities of the day. Some of them,

of course, were ready with their mockery ; but most looked on in respectful silence. Many of them had witnessed the prowess of these strange fanatics in the field. They might be given over to a “senseless and tasteless superstition,” but they could deal shrewd blows with their swords, and therefore they were not to be despised. No truce had been arranged, but one was tacitly observed. The forbearance of the Greeks was partly due to a wholesome awe of the Jewish archers and slingers, partly to a curiosity that, as has been said, was not wholly unmixed with respect.

Then came the solemn ritual of sacrifice. This ended, the whole congregation of the people united in solemn supplication to the Lord God of Israel. Usually it was the custom to stand during the office of prayer ; sometimes the attitude of kneeling was used ; now, as if to express the intensity of their feeling, they threw themselves flat upon their faces, and poured out their entreaty that evils such as they had endured in the past might never again come upon them in the future. “O Lord,”—this was the burden of their prayer,—“if we sin against Thee any more, do Thou chasten us Thyself with Thine own hand, after the multitude of Thy mercies. Make us suffer that which shall seem good to Thee here in our own land, but scatter us no more among the heathen, and deliver us not again unto the nations that blaspheme Thy holy name.”

The prayer ended, came the great Psalm of Thanksgiving; and then the people dispersed to their houses to hold festival. Their mirth was prolonged far into the night, which, indeed, was almost turned into day throughout the streets of Jerusalem, so brilliant was the light that streamed from the lamps set in almost every window.

For eight days the Feast of Dedication was continued. Each day the services began with the customary morning sacrifice. At earliest dawn the Master of the Temple summoned the priests who had been watching round the fire in the gate-house as they waited for his summons. Then they went out and fetched the lamb for the burnt-offering. The creature had already been examined on the previous day, and pronounced to be free from spot or blemish. This done, they went outside the court in which the great altar stood, and watched for the coming day. The Mount of Olives stood between them and the East, and far behind it were the mountains of Moab. Here the first streaks of the morning light were to show themselves. Then the priest whose turn it was to slay the victim of the day bathed in the great laver. Thus purified for the performance of his office, he stirred up the burning embers from under the ashes of the altar, and added fresh fuel. This done, he was joined by the other priests, and the morning sacrifice was offered. Then followed the special ceremonies of the festival,

among them the prayer for deliverance from captivity, as already given, and the singing of the great Thanksgiving. And every day the public services were followed by private rejoicings. No one could have believed that the rejoicing city, gay with its brightly dressed throngs of merry-makers and resounding with the music of tabret and harp, was the desolate place so long trodden down by the heathen. There had been days in the past when the most hopeful could scarcely discern any light in the darkness. But now they could see the “silver lining of the cloud.” In this very Temple, now dedicated afresh with such joyous zeal, but a few years before, the priests “had left the sacrifices when the game of the Discus called them forth.” That deadly folly had been purged with blood. The brutal violence of Antiochus had saved the nation from an imminent relapse into heathenism.

Among the many hearts that were gladdened by these rejoicings there was one, as sorely burdened as any, that had found a complete deliverance from the troubles of the past. The unhappy Huldah, in proportion as her charge gained strength, and her work became less absorbing, had seemed to be falling back into her old condition. For the time her thoughts had been concentrated on the suffering Eglah; now they were free to be turned upon herself, her own troubles, her own dismal memories. Eglah did all she could to keep her employed, and

the girl's gentle and affectionate nature still felt her influence. Yet it was evident that unless some remedy could be found the old madness would resume its sway.

On the first day of the Dedication festival, the two were standing together in the Court of the Women. The priests, who were making a circuit of the whole building, sprinkling everywhere the blood of purification, came in due course to the spot. As they performed their office a drop fell upon the garment of Huldah, who had been joining in the prayers with an earnestness almost frenzied. The effect was marvellous. In a moment the excitement passed away. Her eyes lost their wandering look, and, in a tone calmer and more collected than any that she had ever before been known to use since the time of her trouble, she said, showing the crimson spot to Eglah—"He has heard my prayer; He has sprinkled me with the blood of cleansing." She stood silent and collected until the whole ritual was finished, and when the time for the hymn of thanksgiving came round joined her voice with a quiet happiness to the voices of the congregation.

When the people returned to their homes Huldah left the Temple in company with Eglah. But it was evident that her strength was exhausted. She could barely totter along with all the help that Eglah and a neighbour could give her, and when she came to the house of Seraiah and Ruth, which happened

to lie in her way, she sank almost unconscious to the ground. Providentially at that moment Ruth came up with her husband and the little Daniel.

“She seemed so much better in the Temple—was quite calm and peaceful again—and now I am afraid that she is going to be very ill,” said Eglah.

Woman’s wit suggested to Ruth a happy thought for dealing with the sufferer.

“Leave her to me,” she said. “She was happy here once, and here, if it please the Lord, she will be happy again.”

Ruth and her husband carried her into the house, and laid her upon her bed in her old chamber. Once there she was able to swallow a little broth which had been hastily prepared, cast one grateful look of recognition at her old mistress, and then fell into a deep sleep. The next morning she awoke, entirely restored to reason, and, though still somewhat weak, able to go about the household tasks in which she had been once employed, and which she resumed at once without a question, and as if, indeed, they had never been interrupted for a day. The three years of misery were entirely blotted out of her memory; nor did any spectre from the past ever come back to trouble her.

CHAPTER XXII.

WARS AND RUMOURS OF WARS.

THE Feast of Dedication having been kept and made an ordinance in Israel for ever,¹ Judas's next act was to fortify the restored Temple. It was exposed, even more than the rest of the city, to a sudden attack from the garrison of the fort, which might work irreparable mischief could it gain, even for an hour, possession of the sacred building. Accordingly a high wall, strengthened at intervals by towers, was now erected round it, and a force was told off from the army to watch it. This done, the patriot leader could attend without anxiety to other cares. At Beth-zur a fortress was erected and strongly garrisoned to guard the Eastern frontier especially against the attacks of the Idumeans, who, under their new name, inherited all the old Edomite jealousy of Israel. After personally superintending

¹ See S. John x. 22, 23: "And it was at Jerusalem the Feast of the Dedication, and it was winter. And Jesus walked in the Temple, in Solomon's porch.

the erection of this stronghold, Judas marched against other tribes on the east and south, who had been taking advantage of the troublous times to plunder their Jewish neighbours. The Arabs of the Negeb, or South Country, were defeated at a pass near the Dead Sea, which bore the appropriate name of the Pass of the Scorpions ; the Ammonites, another tribe whose kinship with the chosen people seems to have embittered their hereditary enmity, were defeated under their Greek leader, Timotheus.

Meanwhile life at Jerusalem had been settling down into a peaceful order. The younger of the two priests whom Eglah had befriended had found scope for his energies by joining the army ; Shemaiah, the elder, was again an inmate in the house which had sheltered him, where Eglah, who had never forgotten the charity with which he had spoken of her husband, tended him with all the care of a daughter. The old man was never tired of hearing the story of the two dismal years during which he had been in hiding.

“ Ah, father ! ” she said to him one day, “ you were not so ill off in your poor prison after all. Had you had your liberty you would have seen altars to the false gods in every street. And it was not safe to pass them without showing some sign of reverence.”

“ And how did you fare, my daughter ? ” asked the old man.

“ I could avoid them, knowing where they were, by passing by on the other side, and my good Glaucus—the Lord have mercy on him!—was always kind and helpful. He would fetch the water regularly from the fountain, where there was an altar to the Naiad, as they called the demon of the spring, which I could not have avoided. The people used to laugh at him for doing a woman’s work, but he did not heed them. O why was he taken away before he could learn the truth? I think that he would have known it if he could have lived a little longer.”

And the poor woman burst into a passion of tears. She was always haunted with this fear of her husband’s fate, and reproached herself with not having been earnest enough in speaking of the truth to her husband.

“ Peace, my daughter,” said the old man, gently; “ the mercies of the Lord are without end, and His ways past finding out. Be sure that He will not forget the kindness that was showed to a daughter of Abraham. But tell me,” he went on, anxious to change the subject—“ tell me how we came to find the courts of the Temple desolate and overgrown as though no one had entered them for months? Did you not say that there were sacrifices there, and feasts to the demons whom the Greeks worship? ”

“ Yes, father; it was so for a time. But soon there were few or none to make sacrifices, for the

city was utterly impoverished. So the priests, whom Philip the Phrygian and Apollonius—the curse of the Lord be upon him!—brought in to serve at the altars, went elsewhere, for, of a truth, they would have died of hunger had they stayed here. O father, it was a mournful existence; of a truth we were fed with the bread of affliction and the water of affliction."

As they talked Ruth came in with a troubled face.

"O Eglah!" she cried, "I did hope that we should have peace and quiet, but there are wars and rumours of wars on every side. This morning letters came to the captain from our brethren in Gilead. That evil Timotheus—would to God he had not escaped out of the hand of Judas!—has gathered together a host of the Ammonites and slain some—a thousand, 'tis said, with their wives and children, and shut up the rest in the fortress of Dametha. And now my husband and my brother are in council with the captain, and I fear me much that they will be sent to the wars, for indeed," she added, with a touch of a woman's pride in those that are dear to her, "Judas esteems them highly, and will always have them in places of trust. Nor would I keep them back from helping the Lord's people. But hark! I hear his step."

As she spoke Seraiah came in from the council.

"How is it?" cried Ruth, with trembling voice,

her fears again getting the upper hand. “ Do you go ? and Azariah ? ”

“ Yes, my dearest, I go, and next in command to the captain and his brothers.”

Ruth flung her arms round her husband’s neck. “ Oh ! I am proud of you ; but yet if you could have stayed, for our little Daniel is so young——”

And she could say no more.

“ Nay, wife, be of good cheer, and do not grudge us to the Lord’s service, for indeed there is need of us all. Even while the letters from Gilead were being read there came messengers from Galilee with their clothes rent. From them we heard that the men of Ptolemaïs and of Tyre and Sidon and all Galilee of the Gentiles were gathered together. Then it was determined that Simon should go to Galilee with three thousand men, and Judas and Jonathan to Gilead.”

“ And what of Azariah ? ”

“ He and Joseph, the son of Zachariah, are to be left in the city with the remnant of the army as captains of the people. They are to have the Governor’s house, and you, with our little Daniel, will live there while I am away. This will be well for you, and for Miriam and Judith also, for there will be many coming and going, and Miriam is a fair maiden, as she should be, being kin to you.”

Ruth smiled through her tears at the lover-like compliment.

“Come now,” Seraiah went on, “and get ready what I shall want for my journey, for we set out at sunset.”

The two women kissed each other, and the old priest blessed Seraiah. “The Lord give thee strength in the day of battle, and deliver thee out of the hand of the enemy, and bring thee back to the house of thy fathers.”

At sunset exactly — for Judas was one of the commanders who are exactly and punctually obeyed — the two expeditions set forth.

Their departure was, of course, observed by the garrison of the fort, who were encouraged by it to make some fierce sallies on the diminished forces of the patriots. These were as fiercely repelled, and in a few days things settled down again into the virtual truce which had existed for some time between besiegers and besieged.

Eight days after the departure of the expeditions tidings of victory came from the main army under Judas. The captain of the host had taken Bozrah, in Edom. The place lay at least a hundred miles to the east; but the patriots had covered the distance with unexpected rapidity, and, reaching the place before there had been any notion of their approach, had taken it almost without resistance. The messenger had left, he said, as soon as the place was taken, but Judas had marched the same night to Dametha, which was in urgent need of relief.

The next day came in tidings of further success. Dametha and its garrison, with the crowd of helpless fugitives which had sought shelter within its walls, was safe. The night march from Bozrah had been made just in time. Had it been delayed till morning it might well have been too late. The Ammonites had chosen that very day for a fierce assault upon the place. Just as the day was dawning and the assailants were close under the walls Judas had appeared. His approach had been observed by the besieged, who had watched it from the citadel, but the assailants were taken by surprise. Hemmed in between two attacking forces, the garrison who made a sortie from the town and the army of the patriots in the rear, they had been utterly routed. Timotheus had barely escaped with his life, and had fled northward, followed by Judas in hot pursuit. A few days afterwards came the news that the campaign was at an end—begun and finished within the space of two weeks. This time the captain had found time to write a despatch. It ran thus :—

“ Judas, Captain of the Lord’s host, to Azariah, greeting. Know that the Lord has delivered the enemy into our hands. Timotheus, having suffered defeat at Dametha, fled northward to a temple where the heathen worship the ‘ Two-horned Ashtaroth,’ a strong place by nature and skilfully fortified. I judged it better that I should not spill the blood of

the people of the Lord in assaulting it, and so, having cleared the walls of defenders by help of my slingers, I surrounded it with great quantities of faggots. To these I caused fire to be set, nor did my slingers suffer the Ammonites to approach to put out the flames. In the end the whole was consumed, and Timotheus perished in the fire. The Lord has rewarded him according to his deeds. So much for what has been done: now for what remains to do. This country is not as yet a safe dwelling-place, and will not be till the heathen shall be more thoroughly subdued. It is my purpose, therefore, to bring the people of this land to Jerusalem. Provide, to the best of your ability, for their food and lodging Farewell!"

The exultation felt by the people at Jerusalem when the tidings of their final victory reached them passes description. The times of David, they were sure, were about to return. The promise was once again to be fulfilled—"He shall reign from the flood [the Euphrates], unto the world's end." In the Temple chant of the day the words went—"I will not be afraid of ten thousands of the people that have set themselves against me round about. Up, Lord, and help me, O my God, for Thou smitest all Thine enemies upon the cheek-bone. Thou hast broken the teeth of the ungodly."

But when tidings of still further victories, won by Simon in Galilee, came in to swell the popular

enthusiasm, there was a certain change of feeling, something of the jealousy that almost inevitably springs up when great deeds are done. Joseph and Azariah chafed at the life of inaction which they were forced to live at Jerusalem, and what they thought in their hearts the soldiers did not hesitate to express openly. “Let us also,” so ran the common talk—“let us also get for ourselves a name, and go and fight against the enemies of the Lord.”

On the day after the tidings of Simon’s victories came in the two captains were waited upon by a deputation of soldiers, who came to urge that they might be relieved from the inaction to which they were condemned, an inaction made all the more hard to bear by the glories that were being won elsewhere. Azariah and Joseph listened with attention, and, indeed, were at no pains to hide their sympathy.

“The men are right,” said Joseph, when the deputation had withdrawn. “They will lose all heart if we keep them idling here.”

“In my heart I am inclined to agree with you,” answered his colleague; “but what did the captain say?—‘Watch the garrison of the heathen that they do no hurt to the city and the Holy Place while we are away.’ But he said nothing of going elsewhere, and I should be unwilling to disobey him, for, beyond all doubt, the Lord is with him.”

“Nay, brother, you are too narrow in your

thoughts of obeying. We obey him best if we do the best that we can for the cause of the Lord. And though I honour Judas greatly, yet he is but a captain in the Lord's host, even as we are. Why should we not do as he has done? And tell me, Azariah," he went on, "do you think that the vision which you saw when the angel of the Lord brought you a sword with the Name written on it has been altogether fulfilled? Shall this sword which he bade you use for the Lord always abide in the scabbard? Is this the life to which you are called?"

" You speak truly," said Azariah. " I can scarcely be faithful to my trust if I suffer the sword of the Lord to rust. But tell me, what think you we had best do?"

" Gorgias," said Joseph, " is encamped at Jamnia, and does great mischief to the land and the people; if we can drive him out we shall earn great thanks both from the captain and from our brethren."

The resolution of the commanders was heard with unmixed delight by their men, and with almost equal pleasure by the inhabitants of the city. Some of the more cautious disapproved, and Shemaiah even made his way to the Governor's house—no easy task for his scanty strength—and remonstrated with Azariah. " My son," said he, " your strength is to sit still. Make not too much speed, and be not over-bold." He was listened to with respect, and

even with some compunction on Azariah's part. But it seemed too late to retreat. To hold back now would infallibly give rise to the charge of cowardice, and Azariah, brave as a lion against all outward danger, had not the rare moral courage which would have enabled him to face such an accusation.

At sunrise on the day after the resolution had been taken, the expedition set out with confident expectation of victory, and watched from the walls by an eager multitude. At sunset a miserable remnant came straggling back into the city. They had fared, as their fathers had fared many centuries before, when, with the like unauthorized daring, they had assaulted the hill fortress of Ai, and had returned, bringing discouragement with them. Gorgias had sallied out from his hill fortress, had charged the Jewish force with full advantage of the ground, and had driven them in headlong flight before them. Azariah and Joseph had done all that leaders could do to turn the tide of battle, but their efforts had been in vain. Two thousand men had fallen, the wounded being, perforce, left to the mercy or cruelty of the enemy.

The city was filled with mourning for the dead; and, of course, there was a rapid revulsion of feeling against the leaders whose rash action had ended in such disaster. "Who are these men," was the general cry, "who have caused the people of the Lord to perish? They are not of the seed of those by whose hand deliverance is given to Israel."

CHAPTER XXIII.

MORE VICTORIES.

THE heathen in the fort observed the return as they had observed the departure of the expedition that had ended so disastrously. Their sallies became fiercer and more frequent, and Azariah, his forces weakened by the loss of two thousand men, found it difficult to repel them. Nothing could have exceeded the energy with which he devoted himself to this duty, or the courage with which he executed it. Night and day he was at his post, for it was here only that he found a refuge from the anguish and doubt which tormented him; here only the reproaches of the widows of the slain could not follow him. He allowed himself no rest; sleep he seemed absolutely to do without, and food he hastily snatched at any moment when the opportunity offered.

One remission only from this task he allowed himself, and this because it was a duty. He paid a daily visit to his children. They, too, poor little souls, had not escaped a share in the trouble. The

life which they had led for the last two years had developed their understanding beyond their age, and they felt, if they did not fully appreciate, their father's unhappiness. One consolation they had, the care of two little orphans—the father had fallen in the expedition, and the mother had been struck down by the news of her husband's death—who had been taken into the house and put under the charge of the elderly kinswoman who looked after Azariah's household.

On one of these occasions he found the aged Shemaiah. His first impulse was to avoid the old man, but a few words of sympathy overcame him ; his self-control broke down, and hiding his face in his robe he shed the rare and painful tears of a man.

When the first outburst of grief was over he spoke.

“Tell me, father, why has God forsaken His servant who trusted in Him. I went out in faith—and see the end. Would that I had died in the battle !”

“My son, may it not be that you tempted the Lord ? Did you count the cost when you went forth against Gorgias, whether you had force sufficient for the attack, or skill to handle it ?”

“Does faith, then, go for nothing ? Had Judas men enough, as soldiers reckon in such matters, or skill enough, seeing that he had had no experience in war, when he overthrew Apollonius ?

Yet the Lord gave him the victory because he trusted in Him."

" My son, God gave the victory to Judas, having first given him not strength only and courage, but skill also and understanding. He gives not the same gifts to all: to Moses wisdom and learning, but to Aaron eloquent speech ; to David the arts of war, but to Solomon the arts of peace. Think you that because you are a servant of the Lord, you are therefore to choose the service that you will do ? You would be captain of the Lord's host like Judas. Would you also indite psalms with David, and devise proverbs with Solomon ? The Spirit of the Lord divideth to every man severally as He will. To Mattathias He gave discernment to see in Judas the leader and commander of the people, and the people were obedient to him. And so Judas discerned in you one who might be entrusted with the defence of the city, but not with the warfare against the heathen that are without. This was your service, but you were not content with it. Think not that the Lord has forgotten you, but rather that you have left the place in which you were set."

This was plain speaking, but given with such gentleness and sympathy that the rebuke healed more than it wounded. Humbled yet comforted, Azariah returned to his post before the fortress. But he could not forget that his great trial was yet to come. Nor was it long delayed. The next day

it was evident that something was happening that had attracted the attention of the garrison. The highest tower was crowded with soldiers who were intently watching something that could not be seen from below. And indeed it was a remarkable spectacle. Judas was returning with his victorious army, escorting at the same time a vast crowd of non-combatants, men, women, and children, the whole population of the country beyond Jordan, which could no longer be inhabited with safety, and all Jerusalem had gone out to meet the champion. Then, in a moment, the tower was deserted, the gates were thrown open, and a furious sortie, the last that could be attempted with any hope of success, was made with the whole force of the garrison. It was with a desperate courage that Azariah repelled the attack. Never had he exposed himself so recklessly. He could almost have wished to fall in the fight; for now the dreaded meeting was at hand, and he had to render up to his chief the trust which he had so abused. The attack was repelled, and then Azariah had to remain in an inaction that was almost unbearable till he should be summoned to the interview with his chief.

The sun was just setting when a soldier presented himself, and, after saluting, said, "The general seeks you."

"Has he summoned the council?" asked Azariah, who dreaded a public censure.

“ Nay,” said the man ; “ he is alone.”

And Azariah followed him to the captain’s house, with such a tremor in his heart as no dangers of battle had ever caused.

What followed at the meeting was never known, save as far as the result was concerned. Shemaiah was awaiting his return, and the first glance showed the old man that things had gone well with his friend. The burden of trouble was gone. Azariah looked brighter and more cheerful—so great is the force of reaction—than he had done since he had lost his Hannah. Shemaiah felt that there was no need to question him, and waited in silence for what his friend should please to tell him. What he heard was this :

“ The captain would have kept me in the office to which he appointed me when he departed. He said—and I repeat his words, not for my own glory, but for a proof of his generosity—‘ No man could have better kept the heathen from the fort in check than you have done. Therefore, I would have you stay where you are. I must go again to the wars, for the Idumeans and the Philistines have to be subdued. And I shall go with a lighter heart, leaving the defence of the city in your hands.’ But I said to him, ‘ O my lord, let me rather go with you. You have accomplished to the full the work unto which you were sent of God, and have come back, having redeemed from captivity and death our

brethren from beyond the river, nor lost one of your own people. But I, going in the presumption of my heart to a warfare unto which I was not sent, have accomplished nothing ; I have wrought no deliverance for my people, and the bones of two thousand of my brethren lie scattered on the plain. Henceforth I am but a sword in the hand of the servant of the Lord.' But the captain said nothing. Let it be as he will. As for me, I am content, for I know that he has pardoned me."

Whatever the kind of service in which Judas might see fit to employ his lieutenant, it was clear that there would be no lack of work for him to do.

The victories of Judas in Gilead had been followed by successes won by Simon in Galilee. And from Galilee, as from Gilead, there had been a great migration of the inhabitants, who sought in Jerusalem a safer home than they could find in their own country.

And now, at the head of a more powerful army than he had hitherto been able to collect, Judas set out. His first object was Hebron, which had for some time past been in the possession of the Idumeans. He took it by assault ; it might almost be said, so unexpected was his coming, by surprise. Indeed, one cause of his success was the extraordinary rapidity and secrecy of his movements. Almost the moment that his plans were formed, he

was on his way to execute them. Even if there had been traitors or spies in his camp—and such were almost unknown—any information which they could send to the enemy was outstripped, so to speak, by his action. Hebron had to be abandoned after its capture, for he could not spare a sufficient garrison to hold it. All that could be done was to take care that it should not, for some time at least, become a stronghold of the enemy. Its citadel was destroyed; the towers on the wall burnt, and a furlong of the wall itself broken down.

From Hebron the Jewish leader marched southward, and then turning eastward invaded the country of the Philistines. Azotus, which was supposed to be safe on account of its maritime position, and was, in consequence, negligently guarded, was assaulted with success, and its temples and altars destroyed, though Gorgias was still in force at Jamnia, only nine miles to the north. Several of the smaller Philistine towns were taken on the return march to Jerusalem; and altogether this people received a lesson which they were not likely soon to forget. All this was accomplished with very little loss. Joel, the priest, however, was killed at Azotus, where he had recklessly exposed himself in the attack.

Great as was the popular rejoicing at these victories, it was nothing to the exultation caused by the next tidings that reached Jerusalem—

Antiochus, the oppressor, the blasphemer—Antiochus was dead!

The day after the return of the army a Syrian runner was caught while endeavouring to make his way into the fortress through the lines of the besiegers. He had been sent by Lysias with a despatch to the commander of the garrison. The document was of the briefest. It ran thus:

“*Lysias, the Governor, to the most valiant Eucrates.*

“Know that our most excellent Lord and King, Antiochus, surnamed the Illustrious, is dead in Persia. Let the soldiers that are with you swear allegiance to the son of our departed master by the name of Antiochus Eupator, which he has taken to himself in remembrance of the glories of his father.”¹

The man, when questioned by Judas and the council, was able to supplement the bare news of the King’s death with some interesting details. He had had some talk with the messenger who had brought the tidings to Antioch, and had heard all that was as yet known. His story ran thus:

“The King was in Persia when he heard how his armies had been defeated, not once or twice only, in the land of Judaea. Great was his rage—so great that for the space of three or four hours none dared to come near him. Then he summoned his counsellors to him, and said, ‘I will destroy this nation of rebels till there shall be not one of them left,’ and giving up all other plans he marched westward

¹ Eupator means “Born of a great father.”

with all his army. But on his way he came to the city of Elymaïs, where there is a temple, the treasury of which is reputed to be more wealthy than any in the whole land of Persia, for it has never been spoiled within the memory of man. Even the great Alexander left it untouched, adding also much of the spoil which he had taken himself. This temple the father of the King had sought to plunder; but the people of the city rose against him, and drove him away. When the King came to this city he said, 'Here is another nest of rebels. Did they not rise against the King, my father? Verily I will avenge his memory upon them.' So he went into the city, having some five hundred soldiers with him. And the magistrates received him with honour. And when he said, 'I would see your temple and its treasures,' they consented. 'Only,' they said, 'it is our custom that no armed man may come within the precincts.' 'Will you strip me of my sword?' said the King. 'Not so,' they answered, 'but your followers must be without any, and not more than ten in number.' When the King heard this he was greatly wroth, and said to the magistrates of the city, 'I will come in despite of you.' So he went, he and his five hundred, to the square in which the temple stands. But he found the whole place filled with an armed multitude, and when he would have forced his way into the precincts he was beaten back, losing not

a few of his soldiers, and being himself struck on the head with a stone. After this, whether it was from his rage, which became more terrible than ever, or from any other cause, I know not ; but the King was smitten with some disease, and could no longer ride, as he had been wont, but was carried in a litter. And they say that the stench of his wounds was so great that the men who bore the litter could scarcely endure it, but were changed continually. So they brought him to Tabol, in the land of Persia, and there he died, being terribly tormented with pain. And I heard that when he was dying, he cried out with a most lamentable voice repenting him of the wrong that he had done against the gods in robbing their temples."

" Of what did he speak ? " asked one of the council.

" Nay," said the man, " that I know not. Some said that he spoke of this Temple in Jerusalem, and some that it was the temple in Elymaïs, where men worship the moon-goddess, that was in his mind. But more I do not know."

Judas rose up in his place and repeated the last words of that great triumphal chant in which more than a thousand years before Deborah and Barak had celebrated the overthrow of another king who had mightily oppressed the children of Israel.

" So let all Thine enemies perish, O Lord, but let them that love Him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE SABBATICAL YEAR.

A TIME was now approaching to which the responsible leaders of the people looked forward, for the most part, with great anxiety. This was the Sabbatical year. During a whole twelve months it would not be lawful to carry on any offensive war, or, a far more serious matter, to till the ground. Debate ran high as to whether the Law could be observed in its strictness. There were many who asked, with no little show of reason, "Will it be possible in times so troublous to keep a year of rest? Moses, when he commanded it, thought of a people dwelling quietly in a land from which they had driven out all their enemies. As things are now, these enemies are about us, and even in the very midst of us. And then the harvest? Will it suffice to feed the people, already more than twice as numerous as in the previous year, and daily increasing?"

The answer of the Chasidim was peremptory. "For what," they asked, "have we suffered and fought? For what did the martyrs lay down their lives—Eleazar the priest, and the mother and her sons, and Hannah, the wife of Azariah, and others without number? For what did Mattathias wear out the remnant of his years? Was it not for the Law, that it might be kept whole and undefiled? Might we not have lived in peace, and stood high in favour with the King, if we had been content to forsake the law of the Lord our God? And now that He has given us the victory, and delivered us from the hand of the heathen, so that we may serve Him without fear, shall we cast His commandments behind our backs? Were we not few in number, and scarcely armed, and yet did He not give into our hands great armies, well equipped with shield and sword and spear? Were we not well-nigh perishing of hunger among the mountains, and did He not richly supply our needs? Surely the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof, and, if He will, He can make that which it bringeth forth of itself to abound even as the fields which the sower has sowed and the reaper has reaped?"

And the Chasidim had their way, as zealous men are wont to have it, when they know exactly their own minds and what they want. The Sabbatical year was proclaimed. There was to be no labour, no ploughing or sowing, no tendance of oliveyards

and vineyards. The people were to live simply and wholly on the bounty of the earth.

The first month of the Sabbatical year itself bore the name of the Sabbatical month. Into this were crowded three of the great feasts and celebrations of the year—the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles. But the whole year was to be one round of religious celebrations. To the daily sacrifices in the Temple were added special services of intercession, praise, and thanksgiving. Nor did the Temple-worship alone satisfy the religious wants of the people. The synagogues were thronged, and that not on the Sabbath only but on every day of the week. The Law and the Prophets were read and expounded, not, we may be sure, without many stirring references to the events of the day.

All this religious enthusiasm was wanted to support the people under the hardships of the time. Provisions, if they did not actually run short, began to rise in price. Judas and his council did their best to prevent it; but the selfish instincts of the possessors of corn could not be overcome; stores were held back from the market, and the poorer class, swollen as it was in numbers by the great immigration of the preceding year from Gilead and Galilee, began to suffer seriously.

Meanwhile the insolence of the Greek garrison was increasing daily. The Jewish soldiers contented

themselves, or endeavoured to content themselves, with repelling attack. This meant, of course, standing exposed to showers of missiles which they could not return, and it tried their patience to the uttermost. Even some of the Chasidim were heard to murmur that there must be some limits to this endurance; among the besiegers in general, who had not risen to the height of Chasidim zeal, a spirit of discontent was growing up that might well have become dangerous.

Before long, however, the evil worked its own cure. One sabbath-day, about the beginning of the month which we should call November, there was a great solemnity in the Temple, and the outposts of the besieging force had been more than usually weakened. Ruth, with her little Daniel and her two nieces, was going towards the Temple, escorted by her husband and Micah, when one of the lower gates of the fortress was suddenly thrown open, and a party of Greeks rushed out upon the party. Seraiah and Micah were both armed, but for some minutes they had to make head against their assailants alone. One of the soldiers who had seized Ruth was promptly felled to the earth by a blow from Micah's sword; and Seraiah did similar execution on another. But the odds were too great for them. Micah was brought to the ground, and it was only by desperate efforts that his brother-in-law could save him from being stabbed as he lay. Ruth,

meanwhile, being left without help, was carried off to the very gates of the fortress. And then, just before it was too late, came the longed-for help. The two girls, who, with their little cousin, had been some distance behind, ran screaming towards the Temple, and happily met with their father, who was just about to change guard at one of the posts. He and his company ran at the top of their speed to the scene of the conflict, plunged recklessly through the missiles which were showered on them from the fortress, and reached the wall at the same moment with the ravishers, whose progress was impeded by the struggles of the captive, for, brave woman as she was, she never lost her presence of mind. A few of the party escaped into the fortress, the nearest gate of which was cautiously opened to receive them; but the greater number were instantly put to the sword. Ruth, whose strength broke down when she knew that she was safe, was carried home, sorely bruised and half-unconscious.

Judas was profoundly moved when he heard of this outrage. He had long been chafing under the restrictions imposed upon his action by his rigid supporters, and this determined him to break through them. He had a great affection for Azariah and his kindred. The men were known to him for their loyalty and courage, and Ruth as an indefatigable worker among the sick and wounded. His resolution was taken, but with the prudence and soundness of

judgment that were habitual to him he was careful to avoid any appearance of being peremptory or self-willed. He called to him one of his lieutenants, who was reputed to be a leader among the Chasidim.

“Micaiah,” he said, “you remember when a thousand of our brethren were slain by the heathen, helpless and unarmed, because it was the sabbath?”

“I remember,” replied the man.

“And that it was determined by my father, as captain of the host, with full consent of all the princes and priests, that such a thing should happen no more?”

“It was so determined.”

“Think you, then, that there is one law for the seventh day, and another for the seventh year?”

“I know nothing, save what I find in the traditions of the fathers.”

“Our fathers had no such experience as we have had. No, Micaiah, we will not reap nor sow, trusting that the Lord will feed us. But I see not that the Law forbids us to strike with the sword when the heathen seek to carry our wives and our children into captivity, nor will I lay upon the people a burden that the Lord has not laid upon them. If I sin in this matter, let the punishment fall upon me and upon my father’s house.”

Micaiah was not altogether content, but he did not feel sufficiently convinced to resist. And, indeed, the

character and the exploits of Judas gave an overpowering weight to any conclusion at which he arrived.

The next day an assembly of the soldiers was held, and Judas informed them that operations would be more vigorously conducted for the future. The announcement was received with great satisfaction, even by the stricter partisans of the Law. The insolence of the garrison was summarily checked. The sallies on which it ventured were repulsed so fiercely that they were soon discontinued, while relays of archers and slingers, succeeding each other without intermission from earliest dawn to nightfall, kept the walls clear.

But though this difficulty was surmounted others not less serious remained. The privations resulting from the observance of the Sabbatical year were such as to overtask the endurance of all but enthusiasts. And, of course, under these circumstances it was inevitable that the regulations should be evaded. Huldah, with the children, was wandering one day among the gardens in the neighbourhood of the city. They were searching for some fruit for Ruth who was now making a very slow recovery from the injuries which she had received. They were at liberty to go where they pleased, for all right of property was at an end, at least for the time. But others had been before them, and it seemed as if everything had been gathered, even before it was

ripe. They were returning home with but the scantiest results from this toil when they witnessed a scene of uproar. Some men had been discovered by the officers of the chief priests in the unlawful act of cultivating the ground. They had been sowing the seeds of some quick-growing plants, doing it in such an irregular fashion that what came up might seem to have been chance-sown, but they had been detected, and were now being led off in custody, angry and defiant, and loudly condemning the bigoted folly which, as they said, to carry out an obsolete enactment, condemned a whole people to starvation.

A crowd speedily gathered and followed the officers and their prisoners to the house of one of the chief priests. Huldah and the children went with it. The case was tried, in Eastern fashion, in the open air and in public. The process was short, for the offenders had been caught in the act, and the law which they had transgressed was plain. The defence which they attempted on the plea of necessity was cut short by the judge. "The Word of God," said he, "is of more account than meat and drink. Take these men," he went on, speaking to an officer whom we should call the provost-marshall, "and see that they suffer each forty stripes save one. And you," he added, turning to the prisoners, "know that if you offend again in this matter you shall be stoned with stones till you die."

The men were bound and flogged. That was a sight which Huldah and the children did not wait to see; but just as they were reaching their home the men passed them, furious at the indignity which they had suffered, and loudly proclaiming their determination to be revenged.

The next morning they were missing from the city. A porter at one of the smaller gates was found tied and gagged. He said that he had been attacked by a party of men, some of whom could be identified by his description with the sufferers of the day before. The others were Greeks, apparently belonging to the garrison. They had surprised him, taken his keys from him, and had gone—so he judged from something that he had overheard—on the road to Antioch. This gave a serious aspect to the affair. The men had evidently deserted, and would put all the information that they had at the service of the enemy. Judas immediately ordered a pursuit. But though the party that he sent out was more than once close upon the tracks of the fugitives it did not succeed in overtaking them.

Time went on. The Feast of the Dedication came round, and was kept with as much cheerfulness as the depressed spirits and scanty means of the people permitted. Spring succeeded winter, bringing with it in its milder temperature and in the abundance of its natural growths some alleviations of the common suffering. But the prospect,

as a whole, was scarcely brighter. It was almost a relief when tidings reached the city that a struggle was at hand. It was better, thought many, to die on the field of battle than to sit still and starve. And, indeed, death on the battle-field seemed a likely prospect. Lysias, who had been making his preparations during the whole of the winter, was now, it was said, about to set forth. The force which he had under his command was reported to be overwhelmingly strong, numbering not less than 120,000 men. It was also said that he had with him thirty-two war-elephants. The boy-King—Eupator was not more than nine years old—was also said to be with him.]

CHAPTER XXV.

REVERSES.

JUDAS met the danger with his accustomed resolution. He waited in the city till he could be certain of the road which the invaders were taking. As soon as he knew that it was from the south that they were approaching, he collected all his available force, having for the purpose to raise the siege of the fortress, and marched forth to meet them.

The fortress of Beth-zur, which was intended to be the first line in the defence of the capital, was in danger of falling into the hands of the enemy. Micah had received, early in the year, a commission to re-victual it, but had found the task one that was difficult, if not impossible, to execute. There was a positive scarcity of food, and the scarcity was aggravated as usual by the practice of hoarding. It was to little purpose that Micah scoured the country, making requisitions of grain and other supplies. Some few, strong in their faith, gave up what they had, and committed themselves and their children to the

Lord, whose law they were seeking to obey. Others met the demand with a flat refusal, and at the same time taunted Micah with the folly of enforcing an impracticable law in times of such difficulty. Many met him with the plea of poverty, and their wasted forms and sunken faces were proof enough that this plea was genuine. The work, therefore, for all the zeal that Micah displayed, went on but very slowly, and, indeed, was not half finished when the advanced guard of the army of Lysias appeared. Beth-zur was immediately invested. The engines, of which Lysias had a large stock, played fiercely upon the walls, and preparations was made for an assault. Micah, on the other hand, saw no hope that he would be able to stand a long siege. The garrison under his command was not large enough adequately to man the walls, while it was too large for the stock of provisions which he had been able to collect.

Under these circumstances his resolution was soon taken. Before dawn on the second day of the investment the whole garrison made a desperate sally. Happily they had no non-combatants to care for, and as yet no sick or wounded. Fire was set to the engines. The besiegers, thinking that this was the object of the attack, and that the garrison would make their way back into the fortress, when this had been accomplished, occupied themselves chiefly in putting out the fire. But Micah had no intention of returning. He availed himself of the

confusion caused by the burning of the camp, cut his way with desperate resolution through the enemy, and succeeded in reaching the camp of Judas with the larger part of his force. The rest were not able to follow him, but succeeded in regaining the fortress, which they continued to hold against the Greeks.

The camp was at Beth-Zachariah, about nine miles south from Jerusalem, and on an elevated position, not less than three thousand feet above the level of the sea, which commanded the whole of the neighbouring country. Behind, to the north, could be seen the towers of Jerusalem, with Bethlehem, the City of David, in the nearer foreground, nestling among its oliveyards and vineyards. To the west lay the plain of Philistia, with the white cliff of Gath clearly visible in the extreme distance ; to the east could be seen the purple mountains of Moab. The road from Hebron, by which the Greek army would approach, crept along the eastern side of the mountains. From his elevated position Judas could see the movements of his adversaries while they were still at a considerable distance. Observing that they pitched their camp on the further side of a narrow defile, with the character of which he was intimately acquainted, he conceived the idea of an ambush.

He summoned Azariah to his tent and detailed his plan. Azariah also knew the place well, and

entered into the scheme with enthusiasm—such enthusiasm, indeed, that Judas felt it necessary to give him a parting caution. “Remember,” he said, “if this scheme fails, that you come back to me immediately. If the ambush should be discovered, retreat at once. There must be no attack. I cannot spare a man. We shall want all that we have, if not more than all, to make head against the thousands of Lysias.”

Azariah promised obedience, and lost no time in setting out on his errand. Shortly after sunset he started, having with him a picked force of a thousand men. Before midnight he had reached the place fixed upon by Judas, and there, in a hollow half-way up the side of the hill that formed one side of the pass, he laid his ambush.

It was an anxious night for the little band. It was always an accepted maxim in ancient warfare that it was the most steadfast courage that was wanted for the ambush. Men who were brave enough when fighting in the open plain found their courage fail when they had to lie for hours watching for the moment of attack, crouched upon the ground, unable to move and scarcely venturing to talk. Azariah’s men were brave—indeed they had been carefully chosen for this very service—but they were not altogether insensible of the dangers of their position. They knew, too, and even exaggerated the strength of the advancing army. As

they talked in whispers during the night, for, as may be imagined, few could sleep, they spoke of the chances of the coming day. The elephants, which had never before been seen on Jewish soil, were mentioned with special awe.

“Strange and terrible beasts they are,” said one man to his neighbour; “savage as lions, and many times larger and stronger.”

“Is it so?” said the other. “I heard once from an Arab, who had been driver of one of these creatures, that they are marvellously gentle and tame.”

“Maybe they are by nature; but their drivers have ways of rousing them to fury before the battle.”

“How so?”

“They show them the blood of grapes and mulberries, and the creatures rage terribly. 'Tis said that one of them can tread down a whole company of men.”

“Well, but 'tis possible, I know, to stand against them. King Antiochus, father to the madman whom the Lord smote for his sins, had an array of them in his army when he fought against the Romans at Magnesia, but they profited him little. So Simeon told me—you know the man, the old Benjamite who took service with the King. The Romans stood firm in their rank, and threw their javelins at the beasts' trunks, and in the end, so Simeon said, they did more damage to their own people than to the enemy.”

“ The Lord grant that it be so to-morrow.”

The sun had just risen when the approach of the Greek army became visible. And now the vanguard was almost within striking distance of the ambush which, to all appearance, was still undiscovered. Another few steps and they would be immediately below, at a point where they might be assailed with disastrous effect. Behind a little rock which was within a few yards of the pass Azariah knelt, sword in hand, waiting to give the signal to his men. Their fears had mostly vanished in the morning light, and the dreaded elephants did not form part of the advanced guard.

But just as Azariah was about to give the signal to charge his quick ear caught the sound of tramping feet, which seemed to come from some place above his own position. The next moment he caught sight, in the slanting rays of the early sun, of the glitter of helmets and shields. A Greek force, fully equal in number to his own, was marching in a direction parallel to the pass but higher up the mountain-side. Lysias had learnt wisdom from experience. He no longer despised his enemy, but credited him with the military skill which, indeed, he had more than once proved himself to possess. He had foreseen the ambush, and had sent a force to guard against the danger. Azariah's force, though out of sight of the road, could be seen from the higher ground, and the Greeks greeted their appear-

ance with shouts of laughter. For one moment a wild desire to charge swept through the mind of the Jewish captain. He had hoped to blot out by some brilliant service the remembrance of his former disaster, and now he had failed again. True, it was not by his own fault; yet he had failed, and he would have to go back to Judas empty-handed. A single word would have sent his men in furious onset against the foe. Should he say it? Then there came back to his recollection the gentleness and forbearance of Judas. He could not disobey such a leader a second time. He gave the signal to retreat. His men heard it with disgust; but they knew that he was acting against his own desire as much as against theirs, and they obeyed without a murmur, or, if some of the youngest and fiercest among them complained of the order, it was only under their breath that they spoke.

Azariah now made his way to Judas with all the haste that he could use.

“I have failed,” he said. “The heathen seemed to know of our design beforehand. There could be no surprise, so I did not attack, but came back to you at once.”

“You have done well,” said Judas, who knew what a sacrifice the fiery soldier had made. “A chance victory won by disobeying orders is worse than a defeat.”

But Judas, though, as always, he did full justice

to his lieutenant, was much depressed by the failure of the attempt, and he looked with a gloomy brow at the approaching host, as it came on in all the pomp and circumstance of war, the sunlight gleaming on the banners, the helmets of brass and gold, and on the long, slanting lines of spear-heads. As it came nearer the regular tread of the columns and the clang of arms, with now and then the shrill voice of a clarion or the deep note of a trumpet heard above the roar, moved even the stoutest warrior to something like fear.

Judas followed once more the tactics which he had so often found successful. To stand on the defensive was hopeless ; his few thousands would inevitably be trodden down under the feet of this huge multitude. His only hope was in attack. If he could but break the line at a single point his success might be again, as it had been before, the beginning of a panic, and the great host of Lysias might melt away as the host of Apollonius had melted ; but the attack must be made while the enemy were yet upon ground where they had not space to make full use of their numbers. He charged with his accustomed fury before the vanguard of the enemy had emerged into the open. For a time it seemed as if his audacity was to be successful. The hostile army reeled under the shock of the patriots' furious charge. In two or three places it broke. But there was in reserve a second line of

veterans, the steadiest and best troops that could be found in the Syrian armies, for Lysias knew by this time that none but the very best could stand against Judas and his Ironsides. And then the numbers were overpowering. Step by step the Jewish column was forced back. They left six hundred of the enemy dead on the field behind them; but the attack had failed.

Then, as the Greek army deployed upon the open ground which the retreat of the Jews left open to them, the elephants came upon the scene—the “huge, earth-shaking beasts,” which even the hardiest warrior could hardly see for the first time without some sinking of heart. Each animal was accompanied by picked bodies of horse and foot. Each carried a tower from which skilful marksmen, whose accurate aim was greatly helped by their elevated position, hurled missiles upon the ranks of the foe. The creatures themselves seemed to share in all the fury of the battle. They trumpeted loudly and furiously; at the bidding of the Indian drivers who were perched upon their necks they seized soldiers from among the Jewish ranks with their trunks, whirled them aloft, and then dashed them down, mangled and lifeless corpses, upon the ground.

Then was done one of the heroic acts which stand out conspicuously on the pages of history. Eleazar, one of the Maccabee brothers, saw how his country-



The Death of Eleazar.

men were being demoralized by the terror of these strange adversaries, and felt that it was a crisis that called for personal devotion. One of the elephants was conspicuous among the rest, not only for its superior size but for the splendour of its equipment. He felt sure that it must be the one that carried the boy-King himself. Immediately his resolve was taken. He made his way, striking furiously right and left, and dealing death with every blow, through the Syrian ranks, crept under the huge beast, and dealt him a mortal wound. Like another Samson, he perished by his own success. The creature fell with a suddenness that gave him no opportunity of escape, and he was crushed to death by its weight.

The hero did not accomplish his object, to rally his countrymen. One might rather say that their panic was heightened by the fall of one of the heroic brothers, a son of the great house to which they owed their liberty. But his deed was not forgotten. The fourth of the Maccabee brothers lived in the history of his people as Eleazar Avaran —Eleazar “the Beast Slayer.”

But the battle was lost beyond all hope. The only thing left for Judas was to save as much as he could out of the wreck. He sounded the signal for retreat, drew off his men in good order, and, making his way back as rapidly as possible to Jerusalem, threw himself into the Temple fortress, resolved to stand a siege.

CHAPTER XXVI.

LIGHT OUT OF DARKNESS.

FOR a time the prospects of the patriots seemed dark indeed. Beth-zur had fallen, and the only hope of the cause was in the Temple fortress. This was fiercely assailed by the garrison of the Greek stronghold of Mount Zion on the one side, and, on the other, by the army which had been victorious at Beth-Zachariah, and which now occupied the Lower City. The Temple fortress was strong ; it was fairly well supplied with munitions of war ; and the garrison was large—indeed, almost too large for the accommodation of the place. The fatal weakness of the position was the scanty supply of provisions. Only water was abundant, for the unsparing toil of former generations had provided for this want ; had it not been for this the resistance of the garrison must very soon have come to an end, for food was scarce—so scarce, indeed, that the strength of the fighting men could hardly be maintained by the in-

sufficient rations which were doled out to them, while the few non-combatants received barely enough to keep body and soul together.

The condition of the Jewish population of the city was not as bad as might have been expected. The cruelties of the days of Apollonius and Philip were not repeated; for Lysias, who, as guardian of the boy-King, was practically supreme, favoured a policy of conciliation, and did his best to repress outrage. Indeed he sanctioned the establishment of what may be called a municipal guard or militia, which, while under obligation to give no assistance to the garrison of the Temple, was permitted to protect the peaceful inhabitants of the city. This guard was under the command of Seraiah.

There was much, of course, that it was difficult for those to bear who looked to Judas and his brothers as the hope of Israel. Menelaüs had returned, and with him a whole troop of renegade Jews, whose insolence and impiety sorely tried the patience of the faithful population. And the scarcity of food was only less severe in the city than it was in the fortress.

For some time Seraiah's own household continued to receive mysterious supplies from some unknown source, which made them far more comfortable than their neighbours. Once a week, or even oftener, they would find a bag of corn or flour, a basket of dried grapes or other fruits, a bundle of salt fish, a string

of doves or wood-pigeons, put in an outhouse, nor could they guess who their benefactor could be. But when this had gone on for nearly two months, the secret came out. Seraiah, returning from his military duties at an early hour in the morning, and entering by a little postern gate in order to avoid disturbing the household, saw a man drop from the garden wall. He seized him by the arm, and the stranger, turning sharply round, revealed the well-known features of Benjamin.

“What do you here?” he asked.

“I am come on an errand of my own,” answered the robber.

“But in my house?”

“Ask no more questions,” said the man; “but take my word—and I would not lie to you for all the kingdom of Antiochus—that I mean no harm to you or yours.”

A thought flashed across Seraiah’s mind.

“It is you, then, who have been bringing us, week after week, these supplies of food?”

Benjamin said nothing.

“I adjure you by God that you answer me,” said Seraiah.

“Well, if you will know it, it is I who have done it. Why should not God use a man’s hands to feed His servants, as well as a raven’s beak?”

“Tell me—how did you come by these things?”

“In various ways.”

“ Lawfully ? ”

“ Well, I can hardly say ; you and I might not agree about the matter.”

“ Tell me—did you buy them with your money ? ”

“ Nay ; that is not my way. I do not buy or sell.”

“ Then you stole them.”

“ I told you that we should not agree. But this I know, that they to whom they belonged could do without them better than you and your children.”

“ Benjamin,” said Seraiah, “ you mean well, and I thank you. But after this bring no more of these gifts, for I cannot receive them. I would not have my Judge say to me, ‘ When thou sawest a thief, thou consentedst unto him.’ I had sooner die of hunger—aye, and what is far worse, see my children die—than take that which has not been lawfully acquired.”

“ As you will have it,” said Benjamin ; “ if there were more like you, mayhap I should have been a better man. But meanwhile, the world being what it is, you and yours will have a hard time of it ; ” and he turned to go away. “ And the captain,” he went on—“ how does he fare ? I hear that things are not going well with him. ’Tis a thousand pities, for a braver man never handled sword.”

Seraiah told him briefly the story of recent events, and described the present condition of affairs, the other listening with an eager attention, and breaking

in now and then with an exclamation of wonder and admiration.

“Come, Benjamin,” he said, when he had finished, “why will you not throw in your lot with us? Things look dark just now; but they will brighten. He who has helped us so far will not desert us now.”

“Sir,” said the man, “I would gladly follow the captain, whether he led me to life or to death. No man could ask a better lot than to be his soldier. But I like not all that are with him. They are overstrict, and make no allowance for such as have not their zeal. Once they beat me; another time they had stoned me to death but that I slipped out of their hands; and both for some miserable trifles which no man of sense would care about. No, sir; Judas I honour and love, but these bigots who give a man no peace I cannot away with. And now the day is beginning to break, and I must go. I am sorry that you will not take my poor gifts.”

The next moment he had disappeared.

And now came a time of grievous trouble for Ruth and her young charges, for she had naturally taken charge of Azariah’s two daughters. She did not question her husband’s refusal to share any longer the illicit gains of Benjamin, but she could not shut her eyes to the fact that the children were suffering grievously. For herself she could endure, as women can; the girls, too, were old enough to understand

the cause of their suffering, though they could not enter into the reasons of what seemed so strange an observance—the Sabbatical year; but little Daniel was too young to know much beyond the fact that he was always terribly hungry, and though he was often brave enough to check his crying when he saw how it distressed his mother, there were times when the pangs of hunger were more than he could bear in silence. Poor Ruth denied herself everything but the few scraps that were absolutely necessary to keep body and soul together, and her physical weakness did not make it easier to keep up her hope and courage. Her hardest task, perhaps, was to hide, as far as it was possible, the true state of things from her husband. His strength must be kept up, for so much depended upon it; but the children, not to speak of herself, had to have their scanty share diminished that it might be so. This, of course, he was not allowed to know, and Ruth was at her wits' end again and again to keep it from him.

Within the Temple fortress, meanwhile, things had become almost desperate. A few shekels' weight of flour was given out to each man daily, for Judas insisted that all should share alike. That even this scanty allowance might hold out the longer, numbers of the garrison made their escape every night under the cover of darkness that the remainder might prolong their resistance for yet a few days more.

Before long came a time when absolutely nothing was left. "Their vessels were without victuals," and Judas and the few that still remained with him met to hold a final deliberation.

"My friends," said the great captain, "you see the straits into which we are brought. There is no need to tell you of them, or to prove by words what we all know too well in fact. What, then, shall we do? Shall we stay here and perish slowly by hunger, or shall we fall upon our swords, or shall we sally forth from the gates, and, having slain as many of the heathen as we may, so perish ourselves? I had hoped that the Lord would give deliverance to Israel by my hand, and by the hand of my brothers. But if it be not so, His will be done. For He is not shut up to do that which it pleaseth Him by one man or another. He can call whomsoever He will, and give him strength for the work."

He paused for a moment, and Azariah broke in, "It is well said, O captain of the host. The Lord hath helped His people hitherto, and He will help them to the end. Only let us trust in Him, for"—and here, with an impetuous gesture, he struck his foot upon the rock—"they that put their trust in the Lord shall be even as this mountain, which may not be removed, but standeth fast for ever."

Judas was just rising to announce his resolve when the sound of a trumpet was heard at the gate

of the fortress. It was a herald bringing a message from the young King.

“Have you ought to say to me in private?” asked Judas, when the man was brought in.

“Nay,” he answered; “my message is one that all may hear.”

He then delivered it, reading the words from a parchment which he carried in his hand, and which bore the sign-manual (an impression of the seal-ring dipped in ink) of Antiochus Eupator, as well as that of Lysias. They ran thus:

“Antiochus, surnamed Eupator, King of Syria and Egypt, offers to the people of the Jews peace and friendship. He permits them to worship God after the manners and customs of their fathers, and he hereby revokes all the edicts which the King, his father, having been misinformed by unfaithful advisers, issued against the said nation of the Jews.”

Never was there a more surprising, a more unexpected change in the position of affairs. But it might have been foreseen by those who had watched with a full knowledge of the truth, the recent course of events.

Despatches had reached Lysias from Antioch which convinced him that he and his young charge had enemies to reckon with who would be far more formidable than Judas and his followers. Philip had returned from Persia with the host of Epiphanes, and had assumed the management of affairs, and

Philip was a dangerous rival. Were he to prevail, his own position as the chief adviser of the King would be untenable; and the King himself would very probably be dispossessed by some other claimant to the throne.

He laid the case, or at least so much as it was necessary to explain, before the boy-King. The lad, who was indeed intelligent beyond his years, at once acquiesced in the advice, that easy conditions of peace should be offered to the garrison.

Then an assembly of the soldiers was summoned. All the officers were invited by name, and, after the usual fashion of such gatherings, as many of the men as could crowd into the chambers were also present. To them Lysias said nothing about the news from Antioch, which it would be better, he thought, to conceal as long as possible; but he dwelt on the useless hardships which they were all enduring.

“Famine and the pestilence are upon us,” he said, “and we decay daily. But the place to which we lay siege is strong, and we are no nearer to the taking of it than we were six months since. Now, therefore, let us offer to these men, who are neither robbers nor murderers, peace and liberty, that they may worship God after their own fashion, and live by their own laws. For, of a truth, it is far better, as many of yourselves know, that they should be our friends than our enemies.”

An unanimous shout of approval was the answer; and hence the message which came so opportunely to Judas and his followers in the very crisis of their despair.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A PEACEFUL INTERVAL.

IT was one of the stipulations of the peace offered by the young Antiochus, and accepted by Judas, that the King should be admitted with due ceremony into the surrendered fortress. It was to be a formal acknowledgment of his authority, but nothing more. No change, it was understood, was to be made : the King and his attendants were not to go beyond the court which it was lawful for the Gentiles to enter.

On the morrow, accordingly, the boy-King came with a splendid procession of nobles and officers. In front marched a company of soldiers, picked from the whole army for their beauty of feature and commanding stature, and gorgeous with their gilded arms. Then, in the order of their dignity, came the high officers of state ; last, the young monarch himself, the Governor Lysias leading him by the hand.

The approach to the Temple was thronged by a crowd of eager spectators, none of whom were more profoundly interested in the sight than the little Daniel, with his cousins, Miriam and Judith. The



The Boy King.

child's fancy had been caught by all that he had heard of the young prince. It seemed strange to him, almost beyond belief, that a lad, a little older, it was true, than himself, but younger than Miriam, should have power to do so much harm. "Mother," he said one day to Ruth, "why does God let him hurt so many people? It is all his doing that the brave soldiers are shut up in the Temple, and that we have so little to eat. Will he not be punished for it some day? I suppose, as he is a king, nobody can punish him except God. But He will, won't He, mother?"

Then came the unexpected news of the peace; and nothing would satisfy little Daniel but that he must see the boy-King received in the Temple. Eagerly did the child watch him as he walked in his little suit of armour, which the most skilful artizans in Antioch had made so light as not to be too much for his strength, and great was his delight when Eupator, catching a sight of his eager face, kissed his hand to him with a pleasant smile. That smile he never forgot, though it is true that his old anger against the young king returned next day almost as vehemently as ever when he heard that orders had been given that the ramparts of the Temple fortress were to be broken down, and that the Greek soldiers, anxious to depart, had begun the work of destruction the very hour at which the edict had been published.

Though this breach of faith was a great blow to the patriots, still they had much to console them. In the first place, to their intense relief, the Greek army marched away, and the Holy City was no more defiled by the presence of the heathen. Then the renegade Menelaüs, whom every faithful Jew hated with a more bitter hatred than he felt for the heathen themselves, went away, but not of his own free choice, with the King. Lysias had an honest man's dislike for a traitor, and indeed did not scruple to say that this impostor, who was neither good Jew nor real Greek, had done more than any one else to cause the recent troubles.

Not less welcome was the end of the Sabbatical year. This of itself would not, of course, have relieved the pressure of scarcity; but there was help from without which before had not been available. Hitherto the Jews had been under a ban; they were enemies of the Syrian King, and none who desired to be his friends would have any dealings with them. Now all was changed. The ban was removed. The people were in favour with Eupator and Lysias. A brisk trade commenced, and supplies of food came in abundance. With good heart and hope the people set themselves to their work. From being a city of mourning Jerusalem became gay and cheerful.

The general gladness culminated in the Feast of Tabernacles, always the most joyous of Jewish

festivals, and now celebrated with special manifestations of delight. Never had the people felt so keenly the pleasure of seeming at least to return to the simple life of earlier times, the rustic enjoyments of a nation that had not yet learnt to dwell in cities. It was the ordinance that for seven days the Israelite should dwell, not in his house, but in a booth of boughs. For days waggon-loads without number of the boughs of the olive, the palm, the pine, the myrtle, and other trees which had a foliage sufficiently thick for the purpose, were brought into the city. When a house had a roof of a convenient size and situation, the booth was built upon it ; in many cases it was set up in the court. Those who had come from elsewhere to share in the festival set up their booths in the court of the Temple, in the street of the Water Gate, and in the street of the Gate of Ephraim. It was a beautiful sight at any time, and now the fresh foliage hid the scars of many a grievous wound that had been inflicted during the years of desolation.

Every day, at the time of the morning sacrifice, each Israelite, gaily dressed in holiday attire, made his way to the Temple. Each carried in one hand a bundle of the same branches that were used in the building of the booths, and in the other a fruit of the citron tree. When all the company was assembled, and the parts of the victim had been laid upon the altar, a priest was seen approaching with a

golden ewer in his hand. He had filled it at the pool of Siloam, and he brought it into the court of the Temple through the Water Gate. The trumpets sounded as he came in and ascended the slope of the altar. On each side of this were two silver basins; into that on the eastern side he poured the sacred water; while another priest poured wine into that on the western. Then the “Hallel”¹ was sung; when the singers came to the words, “O give thanks unto the Lord; for He is good, because His mercy endureth for ever,” each Israelite shook his bundle of branches; he did it again when they sang, “Save, Lord, I beseech Thee, O Lord: O Lord, I beseech Thee, send now prosperity;” and a third time at the words, “O give thanks unto the Lord; for He is good: for His mercy endureth for ever.” In the evening there was a grand illumination. Eight lamps, so large and so high that they sent their light over nearly the whole of the city, were set up in the court of the Temple, while many of the people carried flambeaux in their hands. Meanwhile a company of Levites, standing on the steps of the Court of the Women, chanted to the music of cymbal and the harp the fifteen “Songs of Degrees.”²

These were the public rejoicings; the private festivities were on the most liberal scale. Never did

¹ Psalms cxiii.-cxviii.

² Ibid. cxx.-cxxxiv.

the maxim that he who fails to contribute according to his means to the general joy is a sinner above other men meet with a more hearty acceptance.

Azariah with his daughters and little Daniel were watching the ceremonies of the last and greatest day of the feast from the roof of the Governor's house, where they were joined by Micah and by Joseph, who, it will be remembered, had shared with him the disastrous command of the city during the absence of Judas in Gilead. Joseph was exultant; Micah's face was grave and even sad.

"Thank the Lord, Azariah," cried Joseph, "for He has dealt with the traitor after his deservings."

"Whom mean you?" asked Azariah; "for we have had more traitors here than one."

"Whom should I mean but Menelaüs, the false priest who sat in Aaron's seat?"

"And what has befallen him?"

"The King has caused him to be put to death. He was in little favour when they took him home, for Lysias said that he had wrought all the mischief that had been done. And when they came to Antioch the matter of Oniah was brought against him, for there were many who loved the old man, and had taken it ill that his death had not been fully avenged. And when the young King heard the story, Menelaüs being present, and having nothing to say against it, he cried, 'I wonder that the King, my father, suffered this murderer to escape, but he shall

not go unpunished any more. Take him, and cast him alive into the Tower of Ashes.' So they took him and did as the King had commanded."

"And what is the Tower of Ashes?" asked the little Daniel, who had been listening to this conversation with a sort of terrified interest.

Micah answered his question. "At Berea is a tower, the bottom of which is full of ashes, and in the tower is a machine which revolves and plunges the criminal who is bound to it deep into the ashes until he is smothered. But as for this unhappy man, the Lord have mercy upon him!"

Joseph turned fiercely upon him. "I marvel," he said, "that you should pray for this fellow, who was worse than the heathen. He has but had his deservings."

"And where should I be, if I had had mine?" answered Micah. "I walked in the same way with this Menelaüs, and sinned against the Law, even as he sinned, and but that God had mercy upon me, surely I had come to the same end."

"Don't be sorry, uncle," said the boy, holding up his little face for a kiss; "I am sure that God has forgiven you, for He knows how bravely you have fought for Him, and how many of the heathen you have killed with your sword."

"May it be so, dear child! But though He has forgiven me, yet I must reap as I have sown."

“And who shall be high priest in this traitor’s place ?” asked Joseph, after a pause. “ For Oniah, the son of him that was slain at Antioch, is in the land of Egypt, and he takes part with the unfaithful brethren who would build another Temple among the temples of the heathen, leaving the place which the Lord has chosen to set His name there.”

“ And if the House of Zadok have perished, why should not Judas, son of Mattathias, be high priest ?” said Azariah. “ He is of a principal house among the sons of Aaron, and the Lord has been with him always.”

Joseph had never forgiven Judas for his own disaster. His was one of those mean natures that justify the saying, “ The injured may forgive, the injurer never.” The captain had treated him with the same generous kindness which he had showed to Azariah, but this kindness had not been received in the same temper. On the contrary it rankled in his mind, till by a strange, yet not uncommon, perversion of feeling, it had produced a positive sense of injury. He now broke out :

“ Nay, nay, my friend, you say too much. That he has won victories I deny not ; but was the Lord with him when he fled before the face of the heathen at Beth-Zachariah, or when Beth-zur was yielded up to Lysias, or when we had well-nigh perished with famine in the siege, or when the King broke down the ramparts of the Temple ? Not so : what-

ever the people may shout or sing in his praise, he too has known defeat, even as we have."

"This I know," said Azariah, "that whereas we were trodden underfoot by the heathen till there was no life left in us, now we are risen and stand upright."

"And how long, think you," returned Joseph, "will it be so with us? Did we drive away the King, or did he not rather depart of his own accord, because of what he and his counsellors had heard of the doings of Philip? And will he not return, and the end be worse than the beginning?"

Azariah answered, with some heat, "As for that which may happen hereafter, I say nothing. These things are in the hand of God. But that the young Antiochus departed to his own land was, I doubt not at all, of the Lord's doing. Why, even this child knows the story of Sennacherib, and the words which Isaiah the prophet spoke to Hezekiah when the King was faint-hearted, and could not see how there should be any deliverance for Israel. Did not the prophet say, 'He shall hear a rumour, and shall return unto his own land?'"

Joseph said nothing. With all his meanness and littleness he was a patriot, and really loved his country; and it went against his heart and conscience to prophesy evil against her.

Then the little Daniel startled them all by saying, with flashing eyes, "And I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

HOPES AND FEARS.

A FEW weeks after the conversation recorded in the last chapter, Ruth was hearing her little boy repeat the Commandment when Seraiah came in, carrying in his hand an open letter.

“There is news from Syria,” he said.

“And is it good or bad?” asked his wife.

“That I can hardly say,” was Seraiah’s reply. At the same time he signalled to his wife that she should take the child out of the room. The signal, however, was too late. The quick-witted little fellow had heard what had been said, and immediately jumped to the conclusion that something had been heard about the boy-King. His mind was occupied, it might almost be said, day and night with the thought of the young Eupator. He scarcely knew whether he hated or loved him; but the brilliant figure of the lad had caught his imagination. He lived, as imaginative children often will, a sort of second life in thinking of him.

“ Oh ! father,” he now cried, “ I am sure that you have something to tell me about the boy-King. Is he coming here again ? I should like to see him, though he did break his promise so shamefully.”

“ My boy,” said his father, “ you will never see him again.”

“ Oh ! Why ? ”

“ He is dead. This letter tells me all about him.”

The boy burst into a passionate fit of tears, which all his mother’s caresses and attempts at consolation were for some time unable to stop. When the violence of his grief had spent itself he said—

“ Oh ! father, tell me about him. Were they very cruel to him ? And how did it happen ? I thought that kings killed people, but I did not know that any one could kill them.”

“ Listen, my child, and I will try to explain it to you. The father of Eupator, the boy who is just dead, was not rightfully King. He came after his elder brother, and this elder brother had a son named Demetrius, who ought to have succeeded his father. But this son had been sent to Rome as a hostage.”

“ What do you mean by a hostage, father ? ”

“ When you are going to trust some one about whom you do not feel quite sure, you take something from him that he values very much, and say, ‘ You will lose this unless you behave well.’ So Demetrius’s father gave his son to the Romans

to keep, and the Romans were sure that as long as they had the child his father would not do anything that they did not like. Well, as I told you, Demetrius was sent to Rome to be security for his father's good behaviour, and there he lived all the time that Antiochus, whom they called Epiphanes, was King. And when Epiphanes died Demetrius asked the Romans to let him go, that he might claim the kingdom which, he said, belonged to him and which his cousin Eupator was too young to be able to govern. But they would not let him go, and I have been told that Lysias bribed some of the chief men among them, and these persuaded the rest. At last he got tired of waiting for leave, and he ran away from Rome without it, and landed at a place called Tripolis, not very far from Antioch, with only twenty or thirty men with him. But as soon as ever the soldiers at Antioch heard of his coming, they declared that they would have him for their King."

"But why?" put in Daniel.

"Well, if they did not know much that was good about him, they knew nothing that was bad. Anyhow they all rose in his favour; and they seized the young King and Lysias the Governor and brought them to him, and asked him what they should do with them. He would not say, 'Kill them,' for, after all, the little boy was his cousin, and had not done him any harm. And he did not

like to say, ‘Keep them alive,’ for he was afraid that his cousin might some day have his throne; so he only said to the soldiers, ‘Take care that they do not see my face.’ So the soldiers—they were the young King’s own guard—took him and killed him, and Lysias with him.”

When he had heard this the child allowed his mother to take him away. He saw that his father, usually so calm, was anxious and troubled, and, wise with a wisdom beyond his years—the fruit of the troubled life which he and his had been leading—would not ask him any more questions. But that night, when his mother came to give him the last kiss before he went to sleep, he had many things to say to her. Poor little fellow! he had seen many terrible sights, which all his parents’ care could not keep from his eyes, and had heard of many more, and he could not help asking again, “Did they hurt him very much?” and when she had comforted him as best she could on this score, he showed that there was another trouble in his mind. “Oh! mother,” he said, “do you remember that when he ordered the walls of the fortress to be pulled down, I prayed to God that he might be punished for breaking his promise? and only the other day, when Joseph was talking about his coming back, I said—something in me seemed to make me say it almost without my knowing—‘He shall fall by the sword in his own land.’ And now he is

punished, for he has fallen by the sword. Do you think that God listened to me, and did it because I said these things? But, mother, I did not hate him very much; sometimes I used to think I loved him; and oh! it would be dreadful to think that I had anything to do with his being killed!"

"My son," said Ruth, "do you remember what our father Abraham said, 'Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right'?"

"Yes, mother, I am sure that He will do right; and the King did deserve to be punished. But perhaps his counsellors told him to do it; and I am sure that if I was told to do something that was wrong by people that I loved, I should be very likely to do it."

When his mother came to see him some hours afterwards she found him asleep, but his pillow was wet with tears, and now and then a little sob showed how deeply the trouble had entered into his little heart.

There was trouble in older and wiser hearts than his. The Jews had hoped much from the boy-King. His bad faith in the matter of the Temple fortress they had willingly put down to evil counsellors, and they could not forget that he had given them terms, good beyond all their hopes, when they were in the last extremity. The death of Lysias was a more serious loss. He was

the pacifier; to his influence they ascribed the conciliatory policy of the young Antiochus. And now he was gone. Would his death be the signal of a change? Would Demetrius go back to the ways of the mad Antiochus? or had he learnt prudence, if not mercy, from his sojourn among the Romans and the bitter experience of an exile?

Opinion was divided. Some hoped, some feared; but all were resolved that they would never give way, that they would defend to the last drop of their blood the freedom which they had won. Azariah, whose temper of mind had gathered a certain gloom from the unhappy experiences of his life, took a desponding view of the situation. Micah, on the contrary, was cheerful, and he had some strong arguments to back him up.

“Remember,” he said to his brother-in-law one day, when the subject had been discussed at some length between them, “that I have had opportunities for forming a judgment which, happily for you, have not come in your way. I once saw much of these Greeks—I am ashamed to remember the time, but still it would be folly not to make use of what I then learnt—and I am sure that that madman Antiochus did not represent what they really feel. You don’t know how they despise all barbarians as they call them; and, despising them, they are disposed to let them alone. They don’t want us to worship their gods; they think that we are not

good enough. But Antiochus was mad with pride and arrogance, and it is not likely that any one else should be found to follow his steps. We may have trouble; indeed I feel sure that we shall; but depend upon it there will not be another such attempt as the madman made to stamp out our religion."

And the tidings that soon after reached Jerusalem from Antioch seemed to justify this forecast. There seemed to be trouble ahead, but it was not trouble of the sort which had brought desolation upon the Holy City. A deputation from that party among the Jews which affected Greek habits and Greek practices had been admitted to the presence of the new King. They had accused Judas, the son of Mattathias, of having driven them from their land, and of being an enemy to the sovereignty of the Greeks. Demetrius had listened to their representations, and had conferred the office of high priest on Alcimus,¹ the leader of the malcontents, and had promised to send a force which would instal him in his office, and at the same time take vengeance on Judas and the Chasidim. This force was to be under the command of Bacchides, one of the most trusted of his counsellors.

A high priest of the stamp of Menelaüs—for such Alcimus was known to be—would be anything but

¹ Alcimus seems to have been an adaptation, not a little remote, however, from the original, of the Hebrew name Eliakim.

welcome. Probably it would be necessary to resist him and his proceedings by force. Still things were not as bad as they might have been. That King Demetrius should have appointed a high priest at all showed that he was not bent, as Epiphanes had been, on extirpating the Jewish faith. With such doubtful comfort as this assurance could give they were compelled to be satisfied and to await the development of events.

CHAPTER XXIX.

CIVIL WAR.

THE new high priest arrived at Jerusalem, escorted by a powerful force under the command of Bacchides. None but absolute renegades were glad to see Greek soldiers again lording it in the streets of Jerusalem ; but otherwise there was a wide difference of opinion as to the duty of faithful Jews with regard to the reception of the stranger. Alcimus and his Greek companions were loud in their professions of good will. They intended, they said, nothing but benefits to the people. All would be well if they were only received in the same spirit in which they came.

Judas and his brothers received these assurances with profound incredulity. They and their immediate followers had thought it prudent to leave the city. There had been no opportunity of properly repairing the walls of the Temple fortress, and without some such stronghold to serve as shelter in case of need, they would, they felt, be at the mercy of the

Greeks. In the position to which they had withdrawn there was a hot discussion. Judas, as usual, urged the counsels of prudence and common sense. It was easy, he said, to make these professions of peace and good will—so easy that, without some substantial guarantee of their sincerity, it would be madness to risk anything on the strength of them. Alcimus, or Eliakim—he must own that he did not like or trust these double-named Jews, for they were often double-faced also—might be thinking of nothing but peace ; but why did he come with an army behind him ? He might have been sure, sprung as he was from the race of Aaron, that none of his countrymen would harm him. Why had he surrounded himself with a multitude of godless heathen who would be only too likely to harm them ? “ Let us wait ”—this was his final advice—“ till he and his friends give us some proof that they really mean what they say.”

The Chasidim were loud and vehement in their opposition to this counsel. Joseph, whose bitterness and jealousy had not been weakened by the lapse of time, constituted himself their spokesman.

“ The Law,” he said, “ plainly declares that there shall be a high priest. There are acts, acts of the highest importance, even necessity, which only he can perform. Our worship without him is maimed and imperfect. We cannot expect that there will be a blessing upon it, that, lacking this essential part, our sacrifices will be accepted or our prayers heard.

And now we have a high priest that is of the race of Aaron. He promises—and why should we not believe him?—that his purposes towards us are for good and not for evil. Let us go to him, and do him the honour that is due to his office. If harm come of it, we shall have at least obeyed the commandment of God."

Judas and his brothers, with such faithful followers as Seraiah and Micah, stood resolutely aloof, but they could not control the action of the enthusiasts. A large body of the Chasidim paid to Alcimus a formal visit. They welcomed him to the seat of his office; they paid him their homage; intimating at the same time that there were grievances for which they asked redress and abuses which needed reform. Nothing could have exceeded the show of politeness and even friendship with which they were received. Alcimus made the most solemn protestations that neither they nor their friends should suffer any harm. He could only regret that unfounded suspicions had kept away the great soldier who had done so much for his country and whom he would have had so much pleasure in welcoming. They were invited to a banquet, which had been duly prepared, they were assured, in obedience to the requirements of the Law, and of which they could partake without any fear of contracting impurity.

After the banquet there was to be a conference. The proceedings began, and were continued for some

time without interruption, though Alcimus could scarcely control his impatience at what he thought the unreasonable demands of the bigots. Meanwhile Bacchides, who had hitherto kept himself in the background, was quietly surrounding the council-chamber with troops. Joseph was in the midst of an harangue when the doors were thrown open, a company of soldiers marched in, and arrested every member of the deputation. It was now the turn of Alcimus to retire into the background. He had served his purpose, acting, it may be said, as a decoy, and, thanks to him, some of the most inveterate enemies of the Greek party had been entrapped. The Greek commander made short work with his prisoners. Alcimus went through the farce of interceding for them, but he never expected, and, perhaps, never intended, to obtain his requests. Sixty of them were executed on the spot, and the rest were cast into prison. The bodies of the victims were hurriedly thrown into carts, drawn outside the city, and left to be the prey of the vulture and the wild dog.

The horror and dismay which spread through the city with the news of the bloody deed were such as it would be impossible to describe. The victims were well-known men, and, for the most part, as much respected as they were known. There was a frantic rush to do honour to the remains of the martyred patriots. But Bacchides had foreseen that

this would probably occur, and had surrounded the place with a cordon of soldiers. The people could do nothing but stand upon the walls while the birds and beasts of prey mangled the corpses, and mingle, in their impotent rage, curses on the murderers, with lamentations over the dead. In more than one of their national hymns they found a fitting expression of their grief; but none was more suitable to the circumstances of the time than the words of the seventy-ninth Psalm: "The dead bodies of Thy servants have they given to be meat unto the fowls of the heaven, and the flesh of Thy saints unto the beasts of the earth. Their blood have they shed like water round about Jerusalem, and there was none to bury them."

The conduct of Judas did not, as may be supposed, escape censure. It is the first impulse of a multitude in the presence of some great disaster to throw the blame upon its rulers, and the Jews, in their anger and grief, felt and yielded to it.

"Yes," said an old man, who had lost a brother and a son in the massacre, "he was too prudent to trust himself to the heathen; he stood aloof from their danger, and when they offered themselves up as a sacrifice, he was not there."

"And did he not well?" said a zealous partisan. "Did he not warn them and entreat them, and they took no heed to his words?"

"But had he and his men of war gone with

them," returned the other, "they had not been left without defence. But now they went as sheep to the slaughter."

"What can you look for when the sheep will go where the shepherd does not lead them? And as for Judas, did he ever spare his life? Has he not taken it in his hand time after time, fighting with a few men against thousands of the heathen? And tell me now," went on the speaker, "to whom should we have looked for deliverance had Judas also been slain with these? The Lord has had mercy upon His people, lest they should be utterly cast down, and has left unto them their captain."

On the whole, popular opinion was strongly in Judas's favour. Then came another turn of events. The Greek general, weary of his sojourn among a people that hated him, marched out of Jerusalem, and encamped in one of the suburbs,¹ where he could keep his troops better in hand, and not expose them to the daily risk of collision with a hostile population. This place, too, he shortly evacuated, returning with the main part of his army to Antioch, though he left a small force to support Alcimus, who would now, he thought, with this help, be able to hold his own.

But before he went he committed another deed only less atrocious than the treacherous massacre

¹ "Bezeth," it is called. Possibly it may be identified with Bezetha, which was afterwards part of the city.

of the Chasidim. Every partisan, or supposed partisan, of Judas whom he could either entrap or seize was mercilessly slaughtered. Nor did Greeks, who, from motives of expediency or under pressure of superior force, had submitted to Judas, escape.

If Bacchides imagined that these cruelties would strengthen the position of the renegade high priest he was greatly mistaken. Alcimus was more universally, more fervently hated than even Jason or Menelaüs had been. The disappointment caused by this renewal of troubles was all the more bitter because it had succeeded to hopes that seemed so well established. And every one felt that it was Alcimus who was to blame. His greed and ambition had disturbed the peace which they were beginning to enjoy. On his head was all the innocent blood that had been shed.

And now a new horror was added to all that the unhappy country had endured. It was no longer Jew fighting against Greek, but Jew against Jew. Civil war, always more bitter, more ruthless than the very fiercest struggle between strangers, broke out. The renegades rallied to Alcimus. Their interests were bound up with his cause. Some of them had committed themselves so deeply that they could not hope for pardon from the patriots. Others had a genuine dislike for Jewish severity and a liking for Greek license, and fought for all that, as they thought, made life worth living. But the number

of these philo-Greek partisans was but small, and the popular feeling was unmistakably against them, and Judas felt himself strong enough to assert his position vigorously. He was not now a partisan leader, raising the standard of revolt against established authority; he was himself the established authority, justified in punishing all that presumed to rebel against him. This judicious display of firmness, of what might even be called severity, vastly strengthened his position. The waverers who always go with the strongest, who care little for principle, but most for self-interest and safety, when they saw that the sword of Judas was a more immediate danger to his enemies than the sword of the Syrian King, hesitated no longer about joining him. Alcimus found himself deserted by all but a few desperate partisans. The commander of his Greek auxiliaries declared himself unable to give him sufficient help. Accordingly he had no alternative but to give up the unequal contest, and to hurry back to Antioch, where he might lay his complaints before King Demetrius.

CHAPTER XXX.

NICANOR.

THE complaints which Alcimus carried to the Syrian King at Antioch were eagerly listened to. Demetrius was eager, as new rulers frequently are, to reverse the policy of his predecessor. Eupator had yielded to the persistency of these obstinate Jews, but he would show them that it was he and not they who was master. A new expedition should be sent, and this pestilent rebel, who, after all, had been shown not to be invincible, should be extinguished for ever. There was some doubt as to who should be put in command; but ultimately the King's choice fell upon Nicanor, the same that had been associated with Gorgias in an earlier campaign. He had been since promoted to the exalted office of "Commander of the Elephants," and was in high favour with Demetrius.

Once more Judas found himself obliged to retire from Jerusalem, where he could not command the

liberty of movement that was necessary for his safety; but he remained in the neighbourhood, and watched the development of events.

Nicanor's first idea was to repeat the treachery of Bacchides, and to get Judas and his brothers into his power. A letter, written in studiously friendly terms, was sent to the Jewish captain, suggesting a conference, at which the matters in dispute might easily be settled. Judas was not likely, especially after recent experience, to fall into the trap; but nevertheless he did not refuse the invitation. He came to the conference, but he came with a strong guard, and not till he had secured such conditions as seemed to make a treacherous surprise impossible. The meeting took place. Side by side, on two chairs of state, sat the two generals, each with their armed guard within call. On either side was a barrier, beyond which no one that did not belong to the stipulated number of attendants was allowed to pass. The conversation between the two was friendly and animated. Nicanor's treacherous purpose did not prevent him from having a genuine admiration for the character and achievements of his great adversary; and the praises which he heaped upon him were perfectly sincere. But this feeling did not make him at all less anxious to get this formidable hero into his power.

Negotiations had not proceeded very far, in fact had not got beyond the initial stage, when a pre-

concerted signal warned Judas that there was danger at hand. Self-possessed as ever, he showed no sign of having penetrated his companion's intention. A point of some importance was raised by Nicanor, and Judas intimated that he could not deal with it until he had consulted his council. Rising from his seat, without allowing the least indication of disturbance to be seen in his manner, he bade the Greek general a courteous farewell, rejoined his guard, and was soon out of the reach of danger. But when he was again among his friends, he did not conceal his feelings. "He is a false liar," he said, "and, so long as he lives, I will see his face again no more." The words were to have a singularly close fulfilment.

Nicanor, finding his attempted fraud unsuccessful, resolved to try force. He marched against Judas, who, for military reasons, had retired as far as Samaria, and gave him battle at Capharsalama. But the plans of Nicanor were conceived with more haste than prudence. He delivered his attack under unfavourable conditions, and received a crushing defeat in which he lost fully five thousand men.

Thus baffled for a second time, he returned to Jerusalem in a frenzy of rage. On the day after his arrival he went, followed by an armed guard, to the Temple, and forced his way into the Great Court. It was the time of the morning sacrifice, and the trembling priests came down from the altar to salute him.

“ Rebels,” he cried, “ you are praying to your God that the enemies of the King may prosper.”

“ Not so, my lord,” said the presiding priest, “ we have but this moment offered the customary sacrifice for the health and welfare of the most excellent Demetrius.”

“ These are but words, and I ask for deeds. Let this pestilent fellow, this Judas, be delivered into my hands. Thus and thus only shall I know that you are faithful to my lord the King.”

“ But, my lord, you ask that which is impossible. How can we, that are men of peace, have power to lay hands upon this man of war ? ”

“ Ask me not how, but do the thing that I command, or it shall go ill with you and your city.”

“ Nay, my lord, speak not so. Ask that which is possible, and it shall be done to the uttermost of our power.”

“ Fair words ! fair words ! But I know well that, after the manner of your race, for you are the enemies of all men, you curse me behind my back. Now listen unto me. You will not deliver this traitor into my hands——”

The priests attempted to speak, but he silenced them with an imperious gesture.

“ So be it. Then I will take him by force. And when I have taken him, and dealt with him after his deserts, then——” he paused for a moment, and held out his right hand with a threatening gesture

towards the altar—"then I will burn this house with fire ; even as the Chaldaeans burnt it in the days of your fathers, so will I burn it. All the gods of heaven and hell confound me, if I do not burn it, as a man burns a brand in the fire."

So speaking he turned away, and without deigning to salute the terrified priests, quitted the precincts of the Temple.

When he was gone the priests stood weeping and praying before the altar. "O Lord," they said, "for the blasphemies wherewith Thine enemies blaspheme Thee, reward Thou them sevenfold into their bosom. Thou didst choose this house to be called by Thy name, and to be a house of prayer for Thy people. Avenge Thyself, therefore, of this man and his host, and cause them to fall by the sword."

Nicanor had sent to Antioch for reinforcements, for he would not fail again for lack of strength or due preparation, and marching out of Jerusalem, he awaited their arrival at the western end of the Pass of Beth-horon. Judas, who, after his victory near Samaria, had followed his beaten enemy, took up his position at Adasa, an elevated position about four miles to the north of Jerusalem. He thus put himself between Nicanor and the Holy City. But he had only three thousand men to match against a force three times as numerous.

The fate of the Sanctuary of Israel now seemed

to be trembling in the balance. If Nicanor was victorious its doom was sealed. He had vowed, with all the emphasis of an awful curse upon himself, that if he came again in peace he would utterly destroy it. Day after day the women and the old men left behind were continually in the Temple, which, perhaps, they might in a few days see destroyed before their eyes. And when at night the Temple gates were shut they sought their homes to fast and to renew in private their prayers for the deliverance of the Holy Place, and the victory of the armies of the Lord.

By a notable coincidence the anniversary of a great danger and a great deliverance was approaching. Within a few days the Feast of Purim would be celebrated. Would the time bring with it a fresh cause for thanksgiving, or a disaster so terrible that all the deliverances of the past would seem to be of no avail ? "

" Tell us, mother," said little Daniel, one evening when they had returned from their daily visit to the Temple—" tell us about Mordecai and the wicked Haman." He knew the story well, but, after the manner of children, liked it better the oftener he heard it.

So Ruth told the familiar tale again—how the wicked Haman, wroth that the honest Mordecai would not pay him reverence, slandered the whole nation to the King till he obtained a decree for their

slaughter, how Mordecai went to Esther the Queen, a Jewess herself, and bade her save her people, though she risked her own life to do it, how the wicked Haman was hanged on the gallows which he had made for his enemy, and the Jews had license given them by the King to slay their adversaries in every city of the kingdom of Persia.

“And this Nicanor,” she went on, when she had finished her story—“this Nicanor is a new Haman. May the God against whom he has uttered his blasphemies cast him down and destroy him.”

Meanwhile the hour of battle was drawing near. Judas and his little army were bivouacking on the hills of Adasa. It was the 12th day of the month Adar—about equivalent to the beginning of March—and on that high ground the night air was cold and piercing. Seraiah, Azariah, and Micah were sitting by a camp-fire, and talking over the chances of the coming struggle.

It was the eve of the great Purim feast—the memorial which had been kept now for three hundred years of the great deliverance which God had wrought for His people by the hands of Mordecai and Esther. The thoughts of the comrades naturally turned to this memorable day.

“Where and how,” said Micah to his companions, “shall we keep the Purim feast?”

“Shall we keep it at all?” said Azariah, always somewhat disposed to take a gloomy view of their

prospects. “A Mordecai we have, none more steadfast ; and there is a Haman against us even more cruel and wicked than he of Persia. But Ahasuerus is against us, nor do I see who shall turn him from his purpose.”

“Well,” said Seraiah, with a smile, “at least we can use our swords without his license.”

While they were talking they observed a figure emerge from out the darkness into the circle of light made by the flames. They rose to their feet, for it was the captain himself.

“Sit down, my friends,” he said, “we shall be on our feet enough to-morrow.” And as he spoke, he took his seat on the ground by their side.

He went on, after a few minutes of silence, “So Azariah doubts what sort of a Purim festival we shall keep. As for myself I doubt not. But I have been thinking not so much of Mordecai and Haman —though it seems to me a happy thing that we shall fight on the day of that deliverance—as of Hezekiah and Rabshakeh. Did not the king his master send him to blaspheme the Holy City? And did not Hezekiah lay the letter before the Lord? And what was the end? In one night the host of the Assyrians was as if it had not been. So shall it be, I am persuaded in my heart, with this blaspheming Nicanor and his host. He and they shall be utterly destroyed. Yes, Azariah, we shall keep our Purim right joyously, after the manner of our fathers.

But as for our enemies, the wine that they shall drink ¹ will be the wine of the wrath of God."

He rose with these words, and passed away to spend the rest of the night in meditation and prayer. His face next morning, when in the early dawn he stood in front of his slender line, was as the face of one who has talked face to face with God. Not less rapt than his look was the tone of his voice as he poured out the words of his prayer—" O Lord, when they that were sent from the King of the Assyrians blasphemed, Thine angel went out and smote an hundred fourscore and five thousand of them. Even so destroy Thou this host before us this day, that the rest may know that he hath spoken blasphemously against Thy Sanctuary, and judge Thou him according to his wickedness."

A murmur of assent passed through the little army as he uttered these words in that clear, thrilling voice which was one of his many gifts as a born leader of men. The next moment the line advanced, for Judas followed again the successful tactic of attack. Never had his Ironsides advanced with a more determined courage ; never did they deal fiercer blows. The enemy were scattered by their impetuous onset, as the dust is scattered before the wind. For all his brutality and falsehood, Nicanor was no coward. He stood in the very van of his army,

¹ Copious draughts of wine were an important part of the customary celebration of the Purim festival.

giving such cheer as he could to his men, and though the lines behind him reeled and shook with that movement which is the sure presage of defeat to a soldier's eye, at the approach of the Chasidim, he stood his ground with a dauntless courage. He was almost the first to fall, Azariah striking him to the ground with a sweeping blow of his sword. It was an appropriate ending to the blasphemer that he should receive his death-stroke from the weapon that bore the talisman of the Holy Name.

The Greek line had been already beginning to break, but the death of the leader completed the rout.

It was no common victory that Judas won that day. The pursuit was long and bloody. The beaten army fled in wild disorder over the country, only to find enemies on every hand. Before the sun set it was simply annihilated. The tradition of that awful slaughter still lingers in the place, and the valley is called "The Valley of Blood."

Their work done, the conquerors entered the city. The news of the great deliverance had already reached it, and the Feast of Purim was being kept in earnest. During the earlier part of the day the suspense and anxiety had been too great to admit of anything more than formal rejoicing. The customary sacrifices were offered, the customary prayers put up; but the thoughts of all were with Judas and

his men on the battle-field of Adasa. Then came rumours, at first wholly vague and even fictitious—rumours first of victory, then of defeat, then of victory again. An hour or so after noon a swift runner came in with some authentic tidings. But he could not tell of all that happened. This was gradually learnt, and then, long after the darkness had closed in, came the advanced guard of the conquering army, and, close upon midnight, Judas himself. In spite of the darkness, multitudes thronged to meet him. With extravagant manifestations of delight, with shouting and singing, with mingled tears and laughter, they welcomed him home, the deliverer of the city and the Temple. Never before had he been so enthusiastically received. And it was well that it should be so, for this was his last return as a conqueror.

The feast was continued with yet more hearty rejoicing into the next day. And indeed from thenceforth the two deliverances were to be celebrated together—the salvation which Judas had wrought for his people on the battle-field of Adasa, and that which Esther and Mordecai had accomplished in the presence-chamber of the Persian King.

Ruth would gladly have stayed at home and expressed thankfulness in private, but the children were urgent with her that she should take them into the streets that they might see the people

keep holiday. It was a request that, as the wife and sister of patriots, she could not refuse; and in the depth of her mother's heart was the proud thought that the little Daniel was not an unworthy scion of the race, and that not a few would look with admiration on the son of Seraiah, the nephew of Azariah.¹ And indeed she did hear as she passed along not a few whispered praises, which made her pulses beat quick with thankfulness and joy.

As they came in their rambling into the neighbourhood of the Temple, they found their way blocked by a dense crowd, which seemed eagerly pressing forward to see some spectacle of surpassing interest. "What is it?" she asked of one who had been, it seemed, successful in the struggle for a glimpse of this interesting sight, and was now turning away. She could not help shuddering at his answer, and called to the children to come away. But the quick ears of little Daniel had also caught the man's reply, and he loudly objected.

"Nay, mother," he said, "I must see. Such things are not for women to see"—the little fellow of five or six had already caught the masculine tone of superiority—"but I am a soldier's son, and shall not be afraid to look. And when I am a man I shall fight for God and for His Holy Temple."

"You are a brave lad, and if I mistake not, and you are the nephew of Azariah, there is no one here

¹ "Et pater Aeneas et avunculus excitet Hector."

that has a better right to look at yonder sight than you. For 'twas your brave uncle, I am told, that slew that son of Belial with his sword."

So saying he lifted the child from the ground, and raised him till he could stand upon his shoulders. And what did the little Daniel see that made him shout and clap his hands? It was the head and hand of Nicanor nailed against the Temple wall. There were the pallid, distorted lips that had uttered such proud blasphemies against the Sanctuary of the Lord; there was the shrunken, bloodless hand that had been lifted up with threats and scorn against His Holy Place. The Lord had indeed punished the proud doer.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE FALLING AWAY.

THOUGH Jerusalem was almost wild with joy—and, indeed, so utterly had the Greek army disappeared that deliverance was complete for the time—Judas's heart was full of sad forebodings. Demetrius, he knew, had a steadfastness of purpose which augured ill for the future. He was not a madman like Epiphanes, nor a child like Eupator; but a cool-headed, resolute man, who had seen something of the world, and would carry out his plans with both perseverance and skill. Would he sit down under the defeats which he had received and recognize Jewish independence? Judas thought it unlikely. The vengeance might be laid aside, but it would be sure to come. Could he hope to repeat these victories again and again? Once before he had been reduced to the greatest straits, and had only escaped by an unexpected change in the purpose of the young Antiochus. Could he look for anything so marvel-

lous again? Only one plan appeared to him to be possible, and he lost no time in calling a council of his principal followers and announcing it to them. It was certain, he told them, that there would be another war, and a war that would last for years, if only the Jewish people could hold out so long. "We warriors may endure it, and if the worst come to the worst, we can but fall on the field of battle. But what of the old and the weak? What of the women and children? And then we are not united. Our foes are of our own household. We have to fight not only against the Greek, but against the Jew also. And even in this assembly there are some," he went on, with an emphasis which could not be mistaken, "who speak evil of me behind my back. What, then, shall we do? Speak, any one who has counsel to give."

The appeal was met with silence, and the speaker continued, "You have nothing to advise. Listen, therefore, to my counsel, and resist it not in haste because it seems strange. There is a nation that, rising from a beginning small as ours, has now made for itself a great dominion. They are stern to their enemies, but they are just and faithful to their friends. Like Israel in the earlier and better days, they have no king to rule them after his own pleasure, but an assembly that weighs every plan carefully and wisely. And in battle they cannot be resisted. Have you heard of such a people?"

One or two voices answered with the word “Rome.”

“ You have said well,” he said ; “ it is of the Romans that I have been speaking. Let us make alliance with them. We shall be, as it were, an outpost for them against the King of Syria, against whom they have fought already, and, doubtless, will fight again. And they will be a protection to us. And with the Romans on our side, we need fear the Greeks no more.”

One of two of the council were in Judas’s secret. Others had guessed, more or less correctly, what he was intending, but on most the announcement of his intention fell like a thunderbolt. For a few moments there was the pause of intense astonishment. Then followed a burst of indignation, in which, of course, the Chasidim led the way.

“ Say not,” cried one of their chief speakers, “ the Romans are like to Israel because they have no king. Did not Samuel say to the people, when they fell away from their faith because of Nahash the Ammonite, and would have a king after the manner of the heathen round about, ‘ The Lord your God is your King.’ And shall we, knowing that the Lord Jehovah is the King of the Jews, reject Him from reigning over us, and choose us for rulers an assembly of some three hundred idolaters. Will you set these men of sin to be lords over the City of God ? ”

"Nay," replied Judas, "you speak unadvisedly and rashly. We shall have our own rulers. We shall worship after our own way. The Romans will help us in war; and we shall help them as we only can. Did not David make friendship and alliance with Hiram, King of Tyre, and did not Solomon, in whose reign was peace, make that friendship and alliance yet closer?"

The Chasidim replied, quoting the prophets and denunciations of the Egyptian alliance. "Even that accursed Rabshakeh," they said, "spoke the truth, when he said that Pharaoh, King of Egypt, was a bruised reed which will go into a man's hand and pierce it, if he lean upon it. So shall it be with thee, if thou lean upon Rome."

The war of words raged long and furiously. The Chasidim had the best of the argument, but to the majority of the council the prospect of a settled peace was irresistibly alluring. And the influence of Judas, too, was overpowering. By a large majority it was decided to send to Rome, Eupolemus, the son of John, and Jason, the son of Eleazar,¹ envoys who had been selected for the mission by Judas himself.

When the resolution had been passed the council broke up, and the Chasidim dispersed with dark

¹ Observe the Greek names of the two. In each case the father's name is Hebrew, and the son's Greek. This seems to show how far the Hellenization of the people had proceeded.

looks and saddened hearts. The next few days passed in uncertainty and gloom. No news had come from Antioch as to the movements or intentions of the King. But there was little doubt as to what he would do. Whatever they might try to believe in their secret hearts they could not but own that when the opportunity came Demetrius would deal them a blow into which he would put all his strength.

And how would that blow be met? Would they be able to escape it, or parry it, or stand up against it? The Chasidim, the Ironsides, the men who had been the stay and strength of Judas's armies, who had followed him to victory at Beth-zur, at Beth-horon, at Adasa, were miserably dejected. The embassy to Rome had broken their spirits. The issue, before so simple to these stern souls, narrow, perhaps, in their range of vision, but of a clear and single eye, was now confused. While they fought for the Lord against the gods of the heathen, they could confidently expect that He would show Himself greater than all gods, and this faith had made them irresistible. But now, if Jew and Roman were to fight side by side, with what confidence could they call upon the Lord of Hosts? Was He the Lord of *that* host, in whose ranks were ranged the battalions of the uncircumcised?

Some left the leader whom they now regarded as unfaithful to his trust, and departed to distant

villages, hanging up the swords which they were steadfastly resolved not to draw side by side with the heathen. Others, in whom the military instinct of discipline, or the personal attachment to Judas, as the general who had led them so often to victory, were so strong as to overpower all other considerations, remained with him. Nothing could take them from his side, but they went with heavy hearts and with an outlook on the future that was almost hopeless.

Meanwhile the embassy started. What the answer of the Romans would be Judas did not doubt. They would rejoice to secure the alliance of a people who could lend them aid so useful. But would the answer come in time to save the city and the Temple from the wrath of Demetrius?

And indeed that wrath did not linger. Within a month Bacchides was on his way from Antioch with a force of twenty thousand foot and two thousand horse. The renegade Alcimus accompanied him, and was to be reinstated in his high-priesthood. Their line of march was through Galilee. On their way they took the fortified town of Masaloth, and put the garrison to the sword. It was about the time of the Passover feast that the invaders reached Jerusalem. There was some talk about attacking it; but Alcimus was urgent in resisting the proposal. "The King's quarrel," he said, "is with Judas, who is the cause of all this mischief, and

Judas is not here. And the King has commanded that I should be replaced in my office ; but what shall my office profit me if there be no city for me to govern, nor Temple in which I am to minister ? ” Bacchides yielded to these representations, and leaving the city unhurt marched to Beeroth (a few miles north-east of Jerusalem) and there pitched his camp.

Among the patriots there was such doubt and dismay as had never been felt from the day when the aged Mattathias struck the first blow for freedom, not even in that dark hour when Judas and his famine-stricken followers were about to make their desperate sally from the Temple fortress. It was not that they were fighting against overwhelming odds, for they had faced as great before ; it was that they had lost their unquestioning faith in their leader.

“ Ah ! ” said Micah to Azariah, when they were discussing the matter for the twentieth time—and indeed it was almost the only subject of their talk—“ I have seen these heathen from near at hand—I say it with shame—and I know what they are better than you, better than Judas, who is so good that he can scarcely believe that other men are bad. “ He that toucheth pitch shall be defiled,” says Jesus, the son of Sirach, and though our captain is greater than other men, in this matter he is but as they are. What madness drove him to meddle with

the accursed thing ? God forgive me if I speak evil of the ruler of my people, but I must say that which is in my heart."

" Nay," said Azariah, still loyal to his great-hearted chief, though he too had doubts which he had to crush down by sheer force of will—" nay, you go too far. Did not Jehoshaphat, the servant of the Lord, make alliance with the children of Edom when he fought against Mesha, the King of Moab ? "

" But the children of Edom," answered Micah, " were akin to our people ; but as for these Romans, they are utterly unclean. O, brother, I have often thought whether, as a faithful servant of the Law, I could remain any longer with the captain."

" You will not leave us ? " cried Azariah—" it only wants that, and I shall be ready to fall on my own sword."

" No ; I shall not go. If I am wrong the Lord pardon me ; but I cannot go when so many are falling away. Yet if these Romans come—then I shall depart."

" They will not come—at least before the battle. Judas knows it, and it troubles him. As for me, I know not. But this I know, that he is the servant of the Lord, and I will follow him to the death. Nevertheless I cry day and night unto the God of Israel that He will not suffer His servants to be found fighting in the ranks of them that know Him not."

There were the same doubts among the faithful

in the city. The aged Shemaiah had been in the Temple all day, assisting at the sacrifices which were being offered, and the prayers which were being put up for the success of Judas and his army. All night the services would be continued ; but the old man was utterly worn out, and he had been led back by one of the Levites to Seraiah's house.

“ Father,” said Ruth, “ do you think that our prayers are heard ? I know that God does not vouchsafe the visible signs of His presence in His Temple as He did in the days of old, and that He does not touch with fire from heaven the sacrifice that He accepts. But yet He sometimes seems to answer, and we feel in our hearts that He will give us what we ask. Has it been so to-day with you, father ? ”

There was a touching eagerness in her manner, as she put the question. Not Miriam, not Deborah, had loved their country with a sincerer passion than did she ; and then she had a husband and a brother in the camp, and she knew that before another sun had set, their fate and the fate of their country would be decided.

The priest shook his head. “ My daughter,” he said, “ I can give you no comfort, for no comfort has been given to me. My heart was cold within me while I prayed, for I could not forget that the servant of the Lord had touched the accursed thing when he sought the alliance of the Romans.”

"O sir," broke in Huldah, who had been eagerly listening, "he did not do it for his own gain or advancement. He did but seek the peace of Israel."

"Daughter," said the old man, solemnly, "there are that cry 'Peace! Peace!' when there is no peace; and that is no peace which can be got only by unlawful dealing with the heathen. It is God, and God only, that can give this blessing to His people. And He has greater blessings in store than this. Does Judas seek to be honoured and to make us honoured by the nations round about? If he would be in truth the servant of the Lord let him rather be content with the lot of which Isaiah the prophet speaks: 'He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.' So only shall he make many righteous; so only shall he be exalted of God. This is the lot of the chosen people: not to live at ease among the nations."

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE LAST BATTLE.

IT was the night before the battle. Day by day and hour by hour the contagion of doubt and disaffection had been spreading through the little army that followed Judas. He had had three thousand men when he pitched his camp at Eleasa, and the three thousand had now dwindled down to less than one.

Judas was sitting by one of the camp-fires with Azariah and Seraiah, when two soldiers came up, bringing bound between them a man who had endeavoured, they said, to make his way into the camp. He wore his hat drawn down over his forehead, and little of his face could be seen, but there was something in his figure that seemed familiar to Azariah.

“Who are you?” said Judas, “and what want you in the camp? Are you for us or for our enemies?”

“ My lord,” said the man, “ my name is Benjamin, and—for I will hide nothing from you—I am a robber. Once I was a soldier in your army, but I broke the law, and I fled lest I should be put to death. Now I am come, of my own accord, to make such amends for my transgression as I may. Slay me, if you will, as I stand here. There is no need of a trial. I have been tried and condemned, and I acknowledge that I deserve to die. But if you will be merciful, let me fight in the morning by your side ; and on the morrow, if I yet live, let me suffer the due punishment. Life I ask not, but only that I may strike a blow for you before I die.”

“ Unbind him,” said Judas to the soldiers.

The command was obeyed.

“ You are free to go or stay. But I would gladly have you at my side to-morrow, for I have forgotten all but that you are a brave man.”

Benjamin stepped forward, and raising the hem of the captain’s robe to his lips, kissed it. He then knelt, and putting his head to the ground made as though he would have placed Judas’s foot upon his neck.

“ Nay,” said the captain, “ we want not slaves, but brothers.” And he raised him from the ground. “ And now,” he went on, “ sit down and tell us what you know, for I make sure that you have not come empty of news.”

Benjamin did indeed know all that could be known

about the enemy, and, indeed, about the situation of affairs. To a question from Seraiah he replied that a surprise was impossible. The camp was too well guarded and watched.

"Do they know our real numbers?" asked Judas.

"Yes," was the answer, "the deserters have told them." And he proceeded to give a number of names of those who had gone over to the enemy, with a readiness and a precision that showed how diligent had been his watch.

When he had told all his story, and understood that there was nothing more for him to do before the morrow, he wrapped himself in his cloak, and with characteristic indifference to the future, fell immediately into a profound and dreamless sleep.

As soon as the first rays of light were seen Judas mustered his soldiers and hastily numbered them. There were about eight hundred in all, while the army of Bacchides, according to the calculations of Benjamin, which seemed to have been carefully made, could not be less than twenty thousand.

Judas was not dismayed by this disparity of numbers, but was still true to his old strategy of attack. "Let us go up against our enemies," was the exhortation that he addressed to the remnant that was still faithful to him. At first they shrank back. The odds were too vast; the attempt too desperate. An old soldier who had proved his valour

on more than one battle-field was put forward as their spokesman.

"This, sir," he said, "will be to tempt God. Let us now save our lives. Hereafter we will return again, and fight with them. But now we are too few."

But Judas did not waver for a moment. "God forbid," he cried, "that I should do this thing, and flee away from them. Not so; if our time is come, let us die manfully for our brethren, and not stain our honour."

His words roused once more an answering echo in the hearts of those who heard him. They replied with a cry of assent. Victory they could not hope for, but their captain they would follow whithersoever he should lead them, and as long as he lived they would guard his life with theirs.

The little host was then divided into five companies, commanded by Judas and his two brothers, Simon and Jonathan, by Seraiah and Micah respectively. Azariah, whose standing in the army would have entitled him to a separate command, had made a special request that he might be allowed to fight by the side of Judas. Benjamin had begged and obtained the same privilege.

On both sides the trumpets sounded, and both armies moved forward. It was with nothing less than astonishment that the Greeks saw the slender proportion of the force that was opposed to them.

Most laughed aloud at the thought that such a handful of men should venture to stand up against their own well-appointed and numerous host. Others, who had before crossed swords with Judas's men knew that that day's battle, end as it might, would be no laughing matter. And indeed they were right. The little company of Jewish heroes fought as three centuries before Leonidas and his men had fought at Thermopylae.¹ The Greeks came on with the same arrogant confidence in their numbers as did the picked Persian force against the defenders of Greece, and met with a like disastrous repulse. Such was the fury of the Jewish soldiers, such their agility and strength, that they kept the attacking force in check during the whole day. When night approached the Greeks had made, it might almost be said, absolutely no way.

But the resistance, successful as it had been, had cost lives, and Judas saw his force dwindling before his eyes. Then he made his last desperate effort. He threw himself on the right wing, where Bacchides commanded in person, broke the line, and drove it in confusion before him. Possibly he

¹ We commonly talk of the "three hundred" at Thermopylae. As a matter of fact there were *a thousand*, not reckoning the Thebans, who are said to have laid down their arms at once. But the seven hundred men from Thespiae, a little Boeotian town, fought bravely to the end; only their glory is swallowed up in that of the "three hundred" Spartans. Canon Westcott speaks of this battle as the Jewish Thermopylae ("Dictionary of the Bible").

was too rash in his pursuit, but on such a day, when such odds are to be encountered, it is scarcely possible to distinguish between rashness and courage. Anyhow, it was but a brief success. The left wing closed in upon his rear, and he and his gallant band were surrounded. Judas was the mark of a hundred swords and spears. For a time he seemed to bear a charmed life. Azariah and Benjamin, at his right hand and his left, beat down the blows aimed at him, wholly careless of their own lives, while he with the long sweep of his fatal sword—the same that he had taken from the dead Apollonius on his first battle-field—dealt blow after blow, till the ground was covered with the corpses of his enemies. But a spear pierced the stout heart of Benjamin, and a sword-stroke laid Azariah in the dust; and just as the sun sank behind the rugged hills, the hero who had smitten the enemies of his country at Bethhoron and Emmaüs, at Elah and at Adasa, had struck his last blow. The Hammer lay broken on the rock.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE HOPE OF ISRAEL.

A WEEK had passed since the fatal day of Eleasa. Judas had been buried in peace in the grave where he had laid, five years before, the aged Mattathias. The Greek general had been so much impressed with the valour and generalship of the Jewish hero that he strictly ordered that no indignity should be offered to his remains ; and when an envoy came from the surviving brothers to ask that the corpse should be given up for burial, made no difficulty about granting the request. It was only fitting that a brave man should be so honoured. The King, too, had been avenged on his enemy, nor did he imagine for a moment that the rebels, as he called them, would continue to hold out now that their leader had been taken from them. It was impossible for him to foresee that those undaunted brothers would maintain the desperate struggle until they had wrung from the Syrian king the recognition of Jewish

independence. Accordingly he granted a truce for a fortnight, and even sent some of his troops to accompany the funeral procession. It had been a touching scene ; and when the hero had been laid to rest in the sepulchre of his fathers, and the piercing voices of the women, many of whom had struggled over the long and toilsome way from Jerusalem to be present, raised the cry of lamentation, many of the Greek soldiers found themselves moved to tears. This had been the dirge that had been sung over the grave :—

“ How is the valiant man fallen that delivered Israel.
In his acts he was like a lion, and like a lion’s whelp roaring for his prey.
For he pursued the wicked, and sought them out, and burnt up those that vexed his people.
Wherefore the wicked shrank for fear of him, and all the workers of iniquity were troubled, because salvation prospered in his hand.
He grieved also many kings, and made Jacob glad with his acts, and his memorial is blessed for ever.”

And now once more the little company of those whom we have known by name are gathered in Seraiah’s house. The orphaned girls are there, Miriam and Judith, passionately grieving for their father, but yet exulting as passionately that he was at the side of Judas to the last, and that his hope had been at least so far fulfilled that he and the captain whom he loved had been saved from drawing sword among the legions of Rome. Little Daniel,

too, is there, his childish heart sorely troubled with the darkness of a dispensation which he cannot understand ; and Ruth, comforting herself and the children with the thought that he whom they had lost had rejoined his own Hannah, and half reproaching herself for her selfish joy in having her Seraiah still spared to her. Huldah and Eglah, who had been among the mourners at Modin, are there also, and the aged priest Shemaiah.

“ O father,” cried one of the women, “ tell us why these things are so. Why does God so disappoint us of our hopes ? We trusted that it had been he who should have delivered Israel, and now he is dead ! ”

“ We must wait,” said the old man, “ for God’s good time, for He seeth not as we see. Did not David think that Solomon, his son, should be the promised king of Israel ; and, behold, he turned aside to worship idols, and laid such burdens on the people that his kingdom was broken in twain ? And now we, too, have built our hopes upon a man, and they have failed. Surely of Judas it might have been said, ‘ He shall deliver the needy when he crieth, the poor also, and him that hath no helper ; he shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence, and dear shall their blood be in his sight.’ ”

“ We looked,” said Seraiah, “ for the time when all kings should fall down before him, all nations should do him service. He seemed like the stone cut out of the mountain without hands that should

smite all the kingdoms of evil, and we waited for the reign of Messiah the Prince."

"And will Messiah come?" cried little Daniel, who had been eagerly listening to these words, not understanding all, indeed, but catching their general purport.

"Surely, my son," said the old man; "but there are many things to be suffered first."

He was silent for a time, sitting with eyes that seemed to take no heed of the present, but to be gazing into a far futurity. At last he spoke.

"He loved Israel with all his heart, but he has brought upon us a people of iron, harder than the brazen Greeks. He looked to them for help that he might build up the walls of Sion, and behold! in the days to come they will make Jerusalem a desolation and the inhabitants thereof a hissing. And yet, by the Lord's help, he wrought a great deliverance for Israel. He recovered and cleansed the Temple, and by his hand the Lord changed the king's commandment, so that we may once more worship Him in the beauty of holiness. And surely, had it not been for him, when he put to flight the hosts of Lysias, we should have been carried away again into captivity. For this was in the heart of our persecutors; only Judas stood in the way that it should not be done. The Lord reward him for it, and impute not his transgression unto him, for he did not transgress wilfully, or out of an evil heart.

Nevertheless, I am persuaded that it shall not be so when Messiah shall come, for come He will at the appointed time, seeing that the Lord repenteth Him not of His promises. Verily He shall not do homage to any godless bestower of kingdoms, nor listen to the voice of the Evil One, though he promise Him all the world and the glory of it. With His own right hand and with His holy arm will He get Himself the victory ! ”

THE FAMILY OF THE ASMONEANS, OR MACCABEES.

The name "Maccabee," probably derived from a Hebrew word signifying a "Hammer," was originally given to Judas, and afterwards extended to his four brothers. They came of a priestly family, belonging to the first and noblest of the twenty-four "courses," taking its name from a certain Asmon or Chasmon, great-grandfather of Mattathias, father of Judas. The five heroic brothers all met with a violent death.

That of Judas and Eleazar has been already described.

John, the eldest, was killed in a skirmish, shortly after the death of Judas.

Jonathan maintained himself in power by a clever policy of leaning on Rome, and taking part with various claimants to the Syrian crown. He became High-priest at some time after the year 153, and perished in 144 by the treachery of a certain Tryphon, who usurped for a time the throne of Syria.

Simon succeeded to the High-priesthood, and governed the Jewish people for a period of eight years with great success. In B.C. 143 he obtained from the Syrian king a formal recognition of the independence of the Jews, and in the following year he got possession of the fortress in Jerusalem occupied by the Syrian faction. In 135 he was treacherously murdered by his son-in-law, Ptolemaeus.

Simon, who had maintained the alliance with Rome, was succeeded by his son John Hyrcanus, who followed the same policy, and he again by his son Aristobulus, who assumed the title of King in 107.

Mariamne, the unhappy wife of Herod the Great, belonged to the Maccabean House. With the death of her two sons it became extinct.

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